

Covenant

T I M E S

MARCH 1995

DEBATE ON HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE BIBLE

Student Clergy Greg Bullard and Rev. Ragona will have an opportunity to debate the Church of Christ and Patrick Donohue at our church on Monday, April 3rd, at 7:00 p.m.. This is a debate in formal style, with Mr. Donohue taking the position that the Bible condemns homosexuality and those of us from Covenant and the other MCCs in the state holding that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. The debate will follow formal rules with 20 minutes given to each side for presentation of position, 20 minutes for rebuttal, and questions from the audience with 10 minutes for

each side to answer those questions.

This debate gives us an opportunity to reach our community with the positive message of the scriptures and gives the other side the opportunity to know our beliefs regarding the Bible and its very few verses about homosexuality. This is a unique opportunity for people to hear both sides in the same forum and we invite everyone to be present. They will be publicizing the debate in the newspapers and we will be publicizing it in the Alabama Forum. Tell your friends and invite everyone to come hear the truth. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

LENTEN STUDY GROUP

People who remember and enjoyed Mark Link's YOU: Prayers for beginners and others who have forgotten how, our Lenten study two years ago, are sure to enjoy Encounters with Jesus, a prayer and meditation series which we will be using for six Wednesdays in Lent, beginning March 7. This is a different approach, using visualizations, which will explore a story about Jesus from the Bible. We'll be using our imagination to explore in detail — what might have happened in the story, what the scene looked like, how people felt, what it was like to hear Jesus' words for the first time, and what hopes and fears the people around Jesus might have had. This reflection time will be a kind of prayer. Through meditation, you'll be

asked to think silently about how it speaks to you about your relationship with God and how God is touching your life. We will use some of the same techniques we did in our first prayer study. If you are new and missed that study, come and learn some new ways of prayer and new ways to react to scripture. You will enjoy and you will be touched. God has a way of reaching into our lives; this is one of them.

Remember our Ash Wednesday service, March 1 at 7 p.m. We will dispense ashes and serve communion. Everyone is welcome. Even if you have never participated in receiving ashes before, this is something you may want to experience for the first time, and it will deepen your Lenten devotion because it asks each of us to look just a little deeper into our own spiritual need.

Anniversary continues with workshops

Covenant MCC's Anniversary celebration with a day of workshops featuring Dr. Rember "Buddy" Truluck, pastor of MCC Nashville.

Beginning at 10 a.m. on Saturday, March 4 Dr. Truluck will host a series of workshops on top-

ics like "The Bible as Your Friend," "Sharing Your Faith," and "The Bible and Homosexuality." Truluck will also preach at the Sunday morning service.

Plan to attend.

*picture
& caption?*

*More
info*

*Marge's Musings***Love your enemies?!**

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who will use you...then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful just as God is merciful." (Luke 6:27, 35b)

What will it be like when we live in the dominion of God? One of the most difficult ideas for me personally is in the verse above about loving your enemies. I have problems with that. I am in the business of working with hurting people every day. Through my doors come people whom others have hurt very badly. I see an assortment of abused people. I see men who have been beaten by the men whom they love and who love them. I see women who have been physically abused by ex-husbands and current lovers. I see both men and women who have been sexually abused by their parents. I see people whose way of loving includes fist fights and a lot of pushing around, even gun play. I worked for a number of years at a children's hospital and saw sexually and physically abused babies and little tots. I see gay people who have been abused by the churches. I got a letter this week from a woman who could not allow herself to love another woman because of two verses in Leviticus which some kindly Christian had pointed out to her. I see a lot of hurting people and I am pretty clear about who is hurting them. I have pretty well identified the enemy and have a very hard time forgiving them, and often I don't. That may shock and disappoint some of you who think pastors walk on water. (We don't, we just know where the rocks are!) I have a lot of love for our people and I have trouble loving their abusers. However, the Bible does not say stop combatting evil when you

recognize it even when it says to love your enemies.

Greek has four words for love: eros, wanting to possess the beloved (which is not in the New Testament); storge, love of family; philo, brotherly/sisterly love; and agape, love which wishes no ill to another person, which wishes only benevolence for them. I can do that, I think. I can seek their well-being, not do them any evil, and can even bless them; but I'll still have a hard time exonerating them. I'm a political kind of person, and I remember the watchword of the 70s, "The personal is political." What I do with my personal life has all kinds of political ramifications. If you don't believe that, walk through the mall holding hands with your lover — you'll be making a political statement! I refuse to spend the money I earn from the labor of the gay community in any antigay establishment. That's my personal choice. It's because I refuse to let anyone make a profit from the suffering of our community. I try to eat at gay friendly places and to shop where I see multiracial staffs, gay and straight employees, and I do not support businesses that harass our people. I invite others in our community to follow that practice. If I were to take this idea of loving my enemies seriously, I might spend a little money with the religious right, but then I'd stamp my money "gay money" to remind them that we are also present among their customers. But I think I like the idea of just being

benevolent to them without taking this too far. I haven't arrived at perfection yet; I'm still working on this Christian business and this one hits me right in my politics. I'm still trying to do God's perfect will for my life, and sometimes I falter. God's will opens a new window of opportunity for us.

The book of Revelation says, "See, I am making all things new." We serve a God who, through God's providential will, constantly tries to make us new creatures. We don't always understand. I am not the person I was ten or twenty years ago, I am still growing and changing. Paul tells us the physical person is corruptible, dishonorable and weak. One day, in the dominion of God, we will be spiritual beings, incorruptible, glorious and powerful. We will all live, one day, in the dominion of God and we shall be changed. Meanwhile, it is our task to begin to bring the reign of God to earth by, yes, loving our enemies, doing good to those who spitefully use us, and blessing those who curse us. Jesus has reminded us that when we judge others we will be measured by the same measure we use. That's a little scary for me, since I tend to judge my enemies harshly, especially the religious righteous. But then I have a comforting thought: They are also going to be measured by the measure they use to measure us. God is a God of justice! Maybe God will decide it's a draw! Until then, I will just have to concentrate on the business of learning

to love my enemies and bringing in the reign of God. Let's all try it; maybe if we love them and treat them benevolently we will all see the dawning of the reign of God. Let's not be as abusive toward them as they are toward us! Maybe they'll know we are Christians by our love and follow our example.

Rev. Marge Ragona

Paul quote

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*Deacon's Diary***A Baptism of Christ***Newhead***"And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Mark**

10:38b

My name is Eddie Merrell and at the writing of this article I am a deacon in training, a status you might hear some of us refer to as D.I.T.s. And according to Rev. Marge, I soon will be one of your new deacons. I'm not sure what to tell you in this my first Deacon's Diary, so if I start to ramble please forgive me.

Let me start by telling you a little about myself, so that if there are any rumors I can stop them and start a new one or two of my own. I was born in 1963 in Jacksonville, Fla., the only person in my family born outside the state of Alabama, so I should have known something was up. I attended the United Methodist Church for most of my life. I was a boy scout and had a wonderful time growing up. Yes, there were some problems, but why should I dwell on what happened so long ago. It has made me a better adult.

I was one of the handful of people who left CMCC when problems erupted several years back, and yes, I was the one the people called as pastor of that new group. I feel that the split had to happen if the church was ever going to do anything. Now as to why I left, that is between God and me. No one really needs to know why, but if you feel you need to know then come ask me and I will tell you. I feel God has made me stronger and that my ministry is just as strong if not stronger than before the split.

Marge once told me that the church is like a stream. When you put your foot in the water, you can never put your foot in the same spot, because the water has

moved, and even if you are still in the same spot the water is not. Life is the same way. No matter where you stand it will not be the same as time passes. If we as Christians do not start moving and bringing the people to God or maybe bringing God to the people, then what are we supposed to do? If Christ had just stayed in on place, do you think as many people would have heard what he said? If Christ was going around and telling people of the kingdom of God and showing the people how to live with God as the center of their lives, then why are we sitting in our newly padded pews hoping people will find us. Should we not be out and about in our communities showing people and telling people our God, who is loving, cares about them?

I am a drag queen, and I was worried that I would have to give up helping in benefits or doing shows just for the fun, but that is a part of ministry. I can show people I come in contact with that it is possible to do a show on Saturday, go home, sleep and go to church Sunday morning to worship and fellowship with my sisters and brothers in Christ. I have been trying to get a friend of mine to come by on a Sunday night to see how services are. He is scared because he feels that God is not happy with drag queens. Well I'm here to tell you that it is a part of my talent to bring a good, clean, fun time to people and give them a show they will not forget. What I hope to bring to this church as a deacon is the ability to have fun, tell jokes and live life. We can have fun in life and not feel guilty

about it because it is good fun. God does not expect us to sit around and beat ourselves for our transgressions because we are a forgiven people as long as we ask for that forgiveness. We are to get up, get out, and show people God is the center of our lives. If you are single or part of a couple, you have a group of friends who need to see God in you.

I have been in a wonderful, loving and exciting relationship for almost 5 months. No one can ever convince me that God did not bring Roger and me together. We met in church. At first I thought I saw someone God had brought to our church, but as the week went on I saw God had brought us together for a reason. My prayers were finally answered. I finally got to the place in my relationship with God where God says "yes you are ready for that special person" and Roger was and is that special person. Together I hope we can show other couples that it is possible to stay together with God at the center of it all.

In closing we must not keep God's love for ourselves and hope that others will find us, we must show God's love, share God's love and give God's love to everyone no matter who they are. With God as our parent we will never be alone.

*pull you**Covenant*

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Covenant Metropolitan
Community Church

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Pastor

Rev. Marge Ragona

Student Clergy

John Hankins, Andy Mullins
and Greg Bullard (Huntsville)

Deacons

Cal, Shirley, Kay, Cliff

Newsletter Staff

John Foust, Co-Editor
Mark B. Moore, Art Director

Help wanted

Librarian/Bookseller
Sound Operator
Christian Ed Director

More attention

March 1995

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Every Sunday Sunday School for adults and children 9:30 a.m. Morning Worship 11 a.m. Worship (Tuscaloosa) 4 p.m. Program rehearsal 5:30 p.m. Evening Worship 7 p.m.			Ash Wednesday Service 7 p.m.	Bible Study Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.		Workshops 4 Dr. Buddy Truluck hosts day of workshops 10 a.m. Pizza Lunch Noon
NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.	Gay Parents Meeting 6 Inquirer Class 7 p.m.	Choir Practice 7 p.m. Council Meeting 8 p.m.	Study Course 8 Lent 7 p.m.	Bible Study 9 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	10	11
NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.	Board Meeting 13 7 p.m.	Choir Practice 14 7 p.m.	Study Course 15 Lent 7 p.m.	Bible Study 16 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	17	18
Sharing with Friends EXCEL group 5:00 p.m.	Inquirer Class 7 p.m.	Newsletter deadline				
Building Fund Offering 19 Friend Day NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.	Gay Parents Meeting 20 Inquirer Class 7 p.m.	Choir Practice 21 7 p.m. Deacon Training 8 p.m.	Study Course 22 Lent 7 p.m.	Bible Study 23 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	24	All-day Inquirer Class 25 10 a.m.
Community Assistance Offering 26 NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.	Deacon and Staff Meeting 27 7 p.m.	Newsletter production 28 6 p.m. Choir Practice 7 p.m. Deacon Training 8 p.m.	Study Course 29 Lent 7 p.m.	Bible Study 30 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	EXCEL 31	

will we install dragons this month?

Readings for this month

March 5

1st Sunday in Lent

Verse
Verse
Vers

March 12

2nd Sunday in Lent

Verse
Verse
Vers

March 19

3rd Sunday in Lent

Verse
Verse
Vers

March 26

4th Sunday in Lent

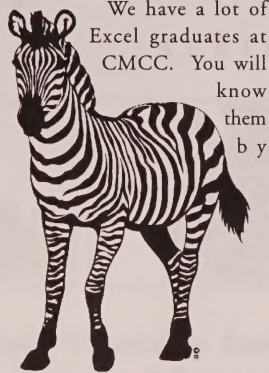
Verse
Verse
Vers

Excel is almost here

The time for MCC's spiritual retreat Excel is almost here. The Excel of the Rainbow Zebra weekend will be held March 31 through April 2 near Toccoa, Ga. The site is at the very base of the Appalachian Mountains.

The weekend begins on Friday evening and ends on Sunday afternoon. All events during the weekend build upon each other, so participants must plan to attend the entire weekend.

There are registration forms in the foyer of the church, or you can call 956-6418 to request a form, or more information. We can only accept a certain number of participants for each weekend, so sign up as soon as possible. Remember, this weekend is open to our entire district.



the rainbow stoles they are wearing. Attending a weekend will let you know where our name, Excel of the Rainbow Zebra, comes from.

We hope to see you there!

*Your Excel of the Rainbow
Zebra team members from
Birmingham,
Shirley, Kay and Cal*

ALL THESE THINGS

*We are fallen leaf carried on water, my Lord.
You buoy us up through stones and eddies,
Murmur, comfort us, move us
Safe through shadows and shoals.*

*We are the child asleep at your breast, O Mother.
We rise and fall in the rhythm of your breathing,
Suckle the milk of grace, grow strong,
Snuggle in the cradle of Your arms.*

*Weak, we hold strong to your power, Dolphin.
Together we burst high from the surging wave,
Arc skyward, are foam and light,
In unison breathe freedom's salty air.*

*You are all things and our wellspring, Creator.
You are the perfect Word from which all psalms flow,
You are the Transformer making dry words real,
And the Urge that makes human joy sharp as lime.*

John Foust

*Friend Day
Address Change!
Subscription form*

GENERAL CONFERENCE

HOTLANTA

JULY 23 - 30, 1995

General Conference is in Atlanta this year at the Westin Peachtree Plaza. Reservations should be received by June 23. Room prices range from \$78 to \$83)

Conference registration is \$180 for non-delegates (\$220 for registration received after March 31).

Weekend registration is \$110 in advance, \$135 on-site.

Covenant T I M E S

APRIL 1995



Christ Is Risen

*Covenant
Easter celebration
includes seder,
worship and
music.*

Holy Thursday Seder

We will observe the Passover *seder* on Holy Thursday, April 13, at 6:30 p.m. Communion will be served at the end of the meal.

For those who have never experienced a *seder*, it is a meal with a liturgy that recaptures the early Hebrews' escape from Egypt. Each year, Jews celebrate the Passover with this meal, acknowledging that an angel "passed over" and spared the Hebrews first born from a plague which struck Egypt, thus convincing Pharaoh to allow the Hebrews to leave Egypt. The liturgy tells how they left in haste, with no time to allow bread to rise; how they killed a lamb to eat before they began the journey; and how their lives had been bitter and they recall that bitterness by the eating of bitter herbs (parsley and horseradish). The eating of the meal is the memorial. For Christians the eating of this meal is also the memorial of the giving of the Eucharist (the communion), for it was at a Passover meal with his disciples that Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body..."

Each year at Covenant we recreate the *seder* with the traditional foods of lamb, roast potatoes, bitter herbs, boiled egg, and *haroses*, which reminds us of the bricks made without mortar but which is really apple, dates and nuts.

We think you will enjoy the *seder*, but more, that you will learn more of Jesus' world and the symbols he lived with. The Holy Thursday liturgy says, "Christ our passover is sacrificed, let us keep the feast." At Covenant, as part of Holy Thursday, we will keep the feast. We hope you will come and will bring the children. The price is \$5 a household (for the special foods which will be served). If that poses a hardship, speak to the pastor. Please bring the children, it will be a learning experience for them, and they will be included in the feast and festivities.

Tenebrae — Service of the Shadows

Tenebrae means "shadow" and refers to the shadow of the cross. Our traditional Good Friday service will be a service of Tenebrae, a reading of the entire Passion narrative from Luke's gospel. There will be eight read-

Thursday, April 13

Holy Thursday Seder

A special meal seasoned with Christian tradition and imagery. \$5
6:30 p.m.

Friday, April 14

Tenebrae Service

Dramatic readers bring the Passion narrative from Luke to life.
7 p.m.

Sunday, April 16

Easter Dawn Service

Early morning worship and breakfast
6 a.m.

Easter Morning Service

11 a.m.

Our Easter Story

Musical presentation full of variety and praise.
7 p.m.

*Marge's Musings***Believing in the power of the resurrection**

"On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark and saw the stone removed from the tomb. She ran and went to Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them... The other disciple went in and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the scripture that [Christ] had risen from the dead."

Easter is coming and with it comes the suggestion that resurrection is possible for all people. I believe in the resurrection. That makes me old-fashioned. It is appropriate these days to confess that one does not believe in a physical resurrection. I believe that the early church met the resurrected Christ. I believe they saw him, broke bread and fish with him, met him on the road to Damascus. I believe that those meetings gave them the courage to change the situation they were in. Paul met the resurrected Jesus and it changed his life. Paul tells the young Christian church that first Jesus was seen by Cephas (Peter), then by The Twelve, then 500, then James, and finally by him, Paul. Paul is aware of his unworthiness to meet Christ. He says, in effect, "Others were reborn, I am an abortion [the literal Greek]. I am the least of the apostles, but I have a great truth that was passed on to me. I know that Christ was resurrected."

The resurrection of Jesus equips us to face the two greatest fears in the world: the fear of dying and the fear of living! However deep our grief that may be coming from the necessary and unnecessary losses of our lives, the bottom line of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ is victor over both life and death. The very existence of the Christian church bears witness to the fact that something happened to transform a broken, beaten group of losers

into men and women who gave their lives for their belief in Christ, whom they witnessed in resurrection power. Those who met the resurrected Christ could never be the same again. There is a Roman coin that has inscribed on it a picture of an ox facing both an altar and a plow, with the words, "Ready for either." While we will probably not be required to die for our faith, the yoke of service certainly awaits us. The challenge is the same. It will cost us our best, maybe even everything we have, to follow Jesus. If Jesus needed you, what would you hold back? Nothing is too much for the one who gave all for us. For the ones who saw the resurrected Christ, things irrevocably changed and they left everything to follow.

I know something more. I have seen resurrections on earth. I have seen people who were literally "dead in their sins" as the Bible describes it and I have seen the change that a working knowledge of Jesus Christ can make in those lives. I have seen broken people come into our churches, their souls bleeding and torn, and I have seen them come back to life! If I had never seen those people, maybe I, too, would not believe in the resurrection, but I know better. Our community is full of resurrected people. I am one of them. I can remember who I was before I learned the truth about



myself, and who I am now; and I can only thank the living Christ for the change.

One of the beliefs of the Christian church is that we will all be resurrected one day, we will meet each other further on. The power of the resurrection prepares us to die, but it also prepares us to live. We are all in the process of dying. As I grow older I am assured that the body wears out and one readies oneself for death. Some of us will die sooner than others. In reality, we are all part of a frantic string of refugees clutching our few mortal possessions and trying to find a safe place to live. In the middle of that condition, God comes promising meaning in life, authentic forgiveness, and strength for each day's

need. Our guilt is removed and we are given the power to live. We are not alone. We have God and we have each other. We are special to God. Our confidence is in a risen Christ who walks with us as a special friend and makes life worth living.

This Easter I hope you, like the women at the tomb, meet the risen Christ, and in that meeting you receive forgiveness of your failings, relief of your guilt, and the promise of new life. Allow God to take your brokenness as a gift and let God give you back the gift of wholeness. It's what Christianity has always been about and still is all about. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

Rev. Marge Ragona

CMCC to debate Church of Christ on the Bible and homosexuality

Student Clergy Greg Bullard and Rev. Ragona will have an opportunity to debate the Church of Christ and Patrick Donohue at our church on Monday, April 3rd, at 7 p.m..

This is a debate in formal style, with Donohue taking the position that the Bible condemns homosexuality and those of us from Covenant and the other MCCs in the state holding that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. The debate

will follow formal rules with 20 minutes given to each side for presentation of position, 20 minutes for rebuttal, and questions from the audience with 10 minutes for each side to answer those questions.

This debate gives us an opportunity to reach our community with the positive message of the scriptures and gives the other side the opportunity to know our beliefs regarding the Bible and its very few verses about homosexuality. This

is a unique opportunity for people to hear both sides in the same forum and we invite everyone to be present.

Support MCC in sharing the knowledge of a loving God. Tell your friends and family who might need to hear that the Bible does not condemn loving same-sex relationships.

Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

Easter

continued from page 1

ers, with people taking the parts of Jesus, Simon, Pilate, the serving woman, etc. Each reader will keep that character throughout the reading, becoming for us the people surrounding Jesus. You are invited to worship with us Good Friday at 7 p.m. on April 14 for the service of Tenebrae and the extinguishing of the candles until they are lit again on Easter morning.



roque to spirituals to contemporary. Four hymns will be featured: the familiar "I Love to Tell the Story," "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" and hymns new to Covenant by contemporary British hymnists, "When In Our Music God is Glorified" and "Christ is Alive!" Hear choral speech, singing, trumpet, organ and piano. This will be an uplifting time of worship you will not want to miss.

Plan to attend "Our Easter Story." Invite your friends and family now to share this experience with you. There will be a reception following the service.

Susan Walker

Easter Dawn Service

Each Easter morning at 6:00 or as closed to pre-dawn as we can get, we meet in the dark and make our way to the dock on the lake at Eastlake Park. We sing the traditional Easter hymns, and speak of the risen Christ. You are welcome to join us for this early morning service and watch the dawn rise, the ducks greet us, and hear again the wonderful words, "Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!" Following the service, we will have breakfast at the church, prepared with the help of our faithful deacons. Our regular service will follow at 11 a.m.

Easter Music Service

"Our Easter Story" is an exciting all-new musical program that the choir will present on April 16, at 7 p.m. The music features choral works by well-respected composers such as: Antonio Vivaldi, Gilbert Martin and Natalie Sleeth. The musical styles range from Ba-

Easter Envelope

Enclosed in this newsletter is an Easter envelope to the church. This newsletter goes out to more than 600 people as a free gift from the church each month. If you would put a check for the amount that this newsletter is worth to you and return that envelope to the church, it would probably pay for many months worth of newsletters. Think about it, and about making an Easter gift to Covenant for the support Covenant gives the community month after month, then send your gift to us at P.O. Box 101473, Birmingham, AL 35210. Better yet, bring it yourself to our Easter 7 p.m. choir production, and allow yourself a wonderful evening of music and friendship.

Covenant
TIMES

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Covenant Metropolitan
Community Church

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P.O. Box 101473
Birmingham, AL 35210
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Pastor

Rev. Marge Ragona

Student Clergy

John Hankins, Andy Mullins
and Greg Bullard

Deacons

Cal M., Shirley C., Kay H.,
Cliff T., Mark B., Eddie M.

Newsletter Staff

John Foust, Co-Editor
Mark B. Moore, Art Director

Don't miss an issue...

- ☐ I'd like to have the COVENANT TIMES mailed to me monthly.
☐ I'd like to know more about your church. Please send me an information pack.

Name _____ Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Send to: P.O. Box 101473, Birmingham, AL 35210

April 1995

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.	2 Debate *See story 7 p.m.	3 Choir Practice 7 p.m. Council of Ministries Meeting 8 p.m.	4 Study Course Encounters with Jesus 7 p.m.	5 Bible Study Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	6	7
Dr. Truluck preaches morning service	9 Board Meeting 7 p.m.	10 Choir Practice 7 p.m.	11 Study Course Encounters with Jesus 7 p.m.	12 Maundy Thursday Seder 7 p.m.	13 Good Friday Tenebrae Service 7 p.m.	14
NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.						15
Easter *See Cover Story	16 Communion Training 7 p.m.	17 Choir Practice 7 p.m. Deacon Training 8 p.m.	18	19 Bible Study Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	20	21
NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.						22
Building Fund Offering	23 Deacon/Staff Meeting 7 p.m.	24 Choir Practice 7 p.m. Deacon Training 8 p.m.	25	26 Bible Study Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	27	28
NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.						29
CAF Offering	30 Contemporary Music *See story 7 p.m. Quilting 2 p.m.	Every Sunday Sunday School for adults and children 9:30 a.m. Morning Worship 11 a.m. Worship (Tuscaloosa) 4 p.m. Program rehearsal 5:30 p.m. Evening Worship 7 p.m.				

Readings for this month

April 2
5th Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 43: 16-21
Philippians 3: 4b-14
John 12: 1-8

April 9
Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50: 4-9
Philippians 2: 5-11
Luke 19: 28-40

April 16
Easter Sunday

Acts 10: 34-43
1 Corinthians 15: 19-26
Luke 24: 1-12

April 23
2nd Sunday in Easter

Acts 5: 27-32
Revelation 1: 4-8
John 20: 19-31

April 30
3rd Sunday in Easter

Acts 9: 1-6
Revelation 5: 11-14
John 21: 1-19

Covenant 2000 includes building

The theme, "Where Will We Be," has many aspects for the year 2000. One of those involves brick and mortar, a building. We have pledged over \$500 per month above

the budget to our Building Fund savings. If we can increase that by \$100 a month for each of the next five years, we will

have that fund at a powerful level. A contractor, realtor, or bank will listen to us when we show them that bank balance.

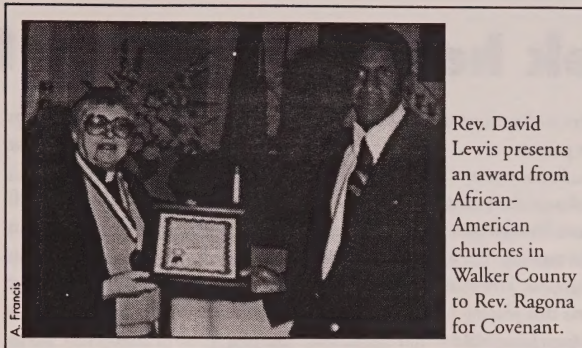
Some have asked what other ways one could augment this program. Covenant has established several funds for designated giving. Related to the building are the Capital Equipment, Building and Piano Funds. Giving to the church is indeed a pleasure, but please keep in mind that the Board of Directors must be consulted for any major gifts such as large equipment items, requests or other financial instruments. This is to keep things with the earthly IRS sorted correctly.

Remember to always specify clearly on your check or envelope the designated funds.

Allan Francis

Hey! Conference Junkies

My name is Steve Parker and I ... am ... a ... *Conference Junkie*. I am coming out and you can too! There is only one cure for us: indulge, indulge, indulge. This is a



Rev. David Lewis presents an award from African-American churches in Walker County to Rev. Ragona for Covenant.

great year for us with two nearby conferences: District Conference in Montgomery and General Conference in Atlanta, Ga.

The Gulf Lower Atlantic District (GLAD) Conference, in Montgomery takes place May 5-7. It features Rev. Elder Darlene Garner and Don Eastman. To receive the room rate of \$50 per night, room reservations must be made by April 5. Early conference fee is \$40 if received by April 28.

General Conference (the whole UFMCC) is in Hotlanta July 16-30. It features almost everyone. Rooms need to be reserved as soon as possible.

You do not have to register to attend worship services at either conference, but you must register to attend the business meetings or any of the workshops. Information and registration forms for both conferences are available in the church foyer.

Don't miss out. Make your plans now.

Steve Parker

Fifth Sunday features singers

Blessed with gifted musicians and singers from diverse backgrounds, CMCC has featured special programs that focus on musical styles like African-American song and southern gospel music in

months that have five Sundays.

On April 30, fans of contemporary Christian music take the microphone to sing praise featuring songs from artists like Sandi Patti, Larnelle Harris, Carmen and others. You can be involved. Submit at least two musical selections, a first and second choice to perform, to Mark Cobb or Rob Roberts no later than April 24. Submissions can be for solo, instrumental or liturgical dance. Please indicate length of selection if possible. You can call Mark at 595-0456.

Maybe you'd like to help

There are always committees to work with and responsibilities to possess at CMCC. The programs you enjoy need people behind the scenes and as we grow, new and different programs and ministries are in the works. Below is a list of some places where help and leadership are needed. Prayerfully consider if you might have a place in one of these positions and if so, talk to Rev. Marge Ragona.

- Youth Sunday School Teacher
- Librarian/Bookseller
- Sound Operator
- Christian Ed Director

The church also has a need for a wheelchair. If you can donate one, please see Steve Parker.

Thanks...

Thank you for the cards, prayers and concerns during my recent hospital stay.

Mark Brown

Quilting bee continues

The Sunday afternoon Quilting Bee continues. From 2 to 4 p.m. groups gather around tables to sketch, cut, sew and chat. Each group is making a 3 x 6-foot panel in memory of someone.

Anyone can make a panel for anyone or any group of people. A person can also be the subject of more than one panel.

On Saturday, June 3, CMCC will host a panel presentation and dedication. Persons who have a new panel to present to the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt can display it at this event. A group of representative panels will also be displayed.

The display will be from 2-7 p.m. The dedication and presentation will be at 7 p.m. A representative from the NAMES Project will accept the panels and see to their shipping. By including panels from a particular geographical area together in one shipment, the chances are better that the panels will be sewn together.

Allan Francis

Tuscaloosa enjoys success

More than 50 people attended a recent worship service at the Tuscaloosa Parish extension. The group met at Bowers Park for a picnic and worship service March 19.

They have also moved into a larger meeting room at the Holiday Inn where they continue to worship at 4 p.m. Sundays.

Parents seek help for custody battles

In recent years the number of children at Covenant has dramatically increased. Gay men and lesbians make excellent parents, but like in so many other ways, sexual orientation can pose a problem for these parents. In a custody case judges can place so much attention on a parent's sexual orientation that relevant issues concerning the child's welfare and happiness are bypassed.

Two parents from our church family soon will face the legal sys-

tem as they stand up for their rights as parents.

Four years ago Kathy Watwood relinquished custody of her two sons because she suffered from a devastating illness and had lost her business. Her thinking at the time was that placing her sons in a two-parent household would be to their benefit. She was wrong.

To her shock on March 1, the Department of Human Resources reported abuse of her older son. With further investigation it was

found that both boys were victims of physical and emotional abuse from their father.

In the terms of his divorce, Cliff Junkins was awarded visitation rights to his two sons. Early last year, the boys were allowed to live full-time with the father and his partner John Moseley for seven months.

Unexpectedly, on a visit to their mother, the children were not allowed to return to the father. The reason: fear. The mother, in igno-

rance, feared the children might contract HIV from John by perhaps drinking or eating after him.

Kathy and Cliff look to this community for financial help. If you can help, note these addresses:

Kathy Watwood c/o Hart and Alfano, Attorneys at Law, 209 Louisa Street, Warrior, AL 35180

Mr. Cliff Junkins c/o Chris S. Christ, Attorney, Frank Nelson Building, 205 20th Street North, Suite 710, Birmingham, AL 35203

Perspectives

Ninety miles

I never ceases to amaze me how that ninety miles seem to just evaporate as I travel down I-65 to visit Mama. My mind seems to be flooded with memories, problems of the day and sometimes some rather delicious day dreams about future husbands. But soon I look up and there I am facing the front door of the nursing home. The building is yellow and sunny and there are little courtyards for visiting and many of the same shrubs and trees that are in Mama's yard. Mama loves flowers. The people in charge try hard with their bingo games and birthday parties but for some of the folks, like Mama, it doesn't really matter because they live in a world of the past now, a world where they felt more needed and in a world they understood.

Mother fell last May, one cloudy Sunday morning, in her kitchen while making coffee. She is well into her 80s (none of us are quite sure how far into those 80s because she is worse about telling her age than the average queen). Until the fall, she had been completely self-sufficient, but

something happened during those three hours Mama lay on that cool linoleum floor. When she was found, her hip was badly broken but what seemed worse was her mind had become foggy and bruised.

She had lived a life of hard work and she had cared for my father for 17 years while he was an invalid. The 17 years were hard on Mama. Not even Mama could be a one person medical team 24 hours a day; but, she tried because that's what "good wives" do. I don't think I could be that type of wife. I guess it is just Mama's turn to rest and it seems she has found that rest by slipping back into her childhood or the childhood of her children. She is very happy in her new world. She always told me, "Phillip, don't you put me in a nursing home with my right mind ... why I just couldn't stand to be around all those old people making quilts and gumming peanut brittle! I know you'll stick me in one but, Lord don't you do it 'til my mind is completely gone!" Mama got her wish.

When I visit with her now, we talk about the school Halloween

Carnival when I was in the sixth grade and she was president of the PTA and they raised more money than ever for library books or sometimes, we talk about the Korean Conflict and how she only has two boys and she hopes to have a little girl someday. Of course, I tried to tell her she got the next best thing but she drifts away before I finish.

Two weeks ago, after work, I drove that path to visit and found Mama in darkness but still awake. She was so pleased to see me and she was ready to talk! Of course, people in my family are always ready to talk. We just don't listen well. But this time, something held me close to Mama's ramblings. She grabbed my hand, held tight, and looked at me with eyes the size of a harvest moon. "Careless", she said. I listened even closer now. "When you're young, baby, you're careless sometimes...careless with life...you don't mean any harm, you're just so busy living that some things get strewn to the side...."

Those words haunted me on that ninety mile trip back. It still haunts me. So many times I might hear people talking but I don't lis-

ten. I guess I'm too busy "living." But it makes me sad. People send out signals. Signals are like red flags in the ocean. They can drift if no one watches them. I would like to think that I stop that drift every once in a while. I am a very special person. I am not always a good or even nice person, but each day I strive to be more aware of my carelessness with my fellow earthlings. For if I am more aware, I may listen just a little more to what someone *isn't* saying. I may study those silent words just a touch more and I may try to give an extra smile when I don't feel it or an extra pat on the shoulder just to let someone know I'm out here. I want them to know that my spirit holds them in my heart. I know smiles, hugs, and pats work for me. Yes, and I realize that I'm a Pollyanna sometimes and this won't stop a divorce or a world war or even pay a Visa bill, but if I reach out far enough and often enough then I might just catch a glimpse of my own spirit and my own "carefulness."

I love you, Mama.

Phillip Butler

Perspectives

Change at home

When Rev. Mel White came to Virginia to keynote the "Breaking the Ice Winter Pride Festival" in Norfolk, Va., none of us could have anticipated the changes his presence would ultimately make in our lives.

Rev. Mel arrived from Dallas and was handed a Norfolk newspaper soon after he left the airport. To his surprise, the front page of the newspaper featured a letter Mel had sent to Pat Robertson before he left Dallas and a letter of response from Pat Robertson. Mel, who is now openly gay and is a former ghostwriter for Robertson, had asked to meet with Robertson to discuss how Robertson's use of anti-gay rhetoric can lead to anti-gay hate crimes and even death. Among other things, Robertson refused flatly to meet with Mel.

That was the beginning.

Mel was determined that Robertson hear his message. At the pride festival, Rev. White called on the local community to support his efforts to meet with Robertson. A core group of local individuals organized quickly. People affiliated with the Metropolitan Community Church, the Unitarian Universalist Church, P-FLAG, Virginians for Justice, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force immediately began meeting and planning strategy. The goal was a simple one: We all wanted Robertson to meet with Mel.

That finally happened on March 8 in the Virginia Beach City Jail.

Grassroots organizers met daily between Mel's arrival in Tidewater Virginia, his arrest for trespassing at Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) on Feb. 15, his jail stay and

fast from February 15 until March 8, and his March 8 meeting with Robertson. Each day a group of local clergy people and community leaders returned to the CBN compound to ask Robertson to meet with Mel. We faxed news releases across the country, organized a vigil against hate crimes which hundreds attended, and encouraged religious groups to call on Robertson to acknowledge the consequences of his words and to meet with Mel.

Mel White showed himself to be a man of courage and conviction. He was determined to meet with Robertson and discuss the impact of Robertson's words on the gay and lesbian community. He held onto that determination until Robertson yielded.

For me though, the real story here was an act of civil disobedience which mobilized a local community into action. Hundreds of people in the greater Virginia Beach/Norfolk community stood up and were counted.

I continuously spoke with people who told me that this was the first time they have ever stood up against the hate directed at gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. A new community has emerged. A community which has connected gay Christians with heterosexual Christians, older people with younger ones, career community activists

with people who have never before taken a public stand, men with women, and ministers with atheists. That community is a vibrant, exciting one which won't go away.

"Mel White showed himself to be a man of courage and conviction. He was determined to meet with Robertson and discuss the impact of Robertson's words on the gay and lesbian community. He held onto that determination until Robertson yielded."

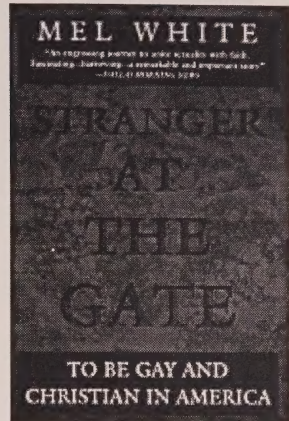
We've learned a lot. We have found through Mel's example a new community which respects the greater human condition. We took control of our destiny in our own back yard.

Grassroots activism is where it all begins. It is here that we have the greatest ability to create change and make a better world.

Even the "more seasoned" activists, such as myself, have been amazed at the power we derive from being in unique situations which allow us to look beyond the more traditional ways we try to create change for the benefit of all people. We have received quite an education here in Eastern Virginia...may everyone reading these words experience a similar education. We should take control of our lives and our destiny. We have learned that we can do that!

Don Davis

Don Davis is a resident of Williamsburg, Virginia, a member of the Board of Directors of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and was involved in Rev. Mel White's act of civil disobedience from its inception.



Our call for justice

When a book can speak to people of different races, genders, backgrounds and sexual orientations and describe the need for all people to find acceptance and love, and to struggle for justice and human understanding, then that book has a good chance of changing the world. You'll feel this urgency while reading *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America*.

Rev. Mel White was a ghostwriter, friend and confidant to men like Oliver North, Jim Bakker, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, political and religious leaders who have become active attackers of gays and lesbians.

But in this book, White responds to the irresponsibility and ignorance of his former clients and colleagues. He describes his personal struggle of self-loathing, shock treatments, and fruitless counseling from his childhood through his lengthy marriage and to where he is today — an advocate for human rights.

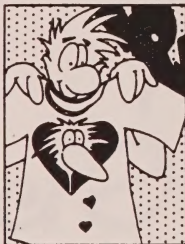
The words he writes are filled with love and anger, courage and fear. *Stranger at the Gate* is sure to move you to emotion, if not to action.

Mark B. Moore

P.O. Box 101473
Birmingham, AL 35210

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WASH AND GO!



You mean I can wash my coolest creation? You betcha!



Machine wash warm, preferably with a mild detergent.

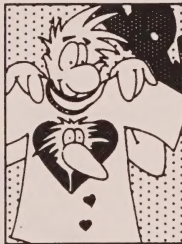


Ironing? No problem! In fact, ironing right over decoration will make the colors razzle-dazzle.

Seller's stamp:



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Marjorie Ragona
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Covenant

T I M E S

THE NEWSLETTER OF
COVENANT METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH



NO TRACKS

NO TAPES

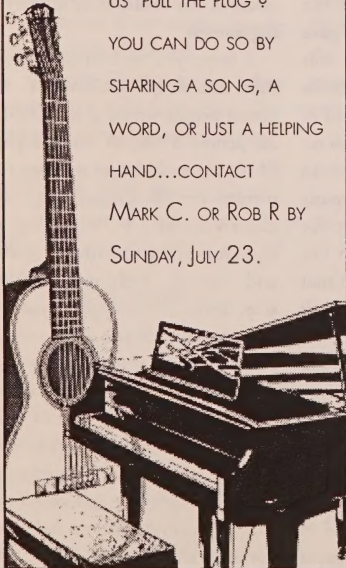
NO KIDDING!

UNWIRED FOR SOUND...

5th Sunday Unplugged

• JOIN US FOR AN
EVENING OF LIVE MUSIC,
WORSHIP, AND
FELLOWSHIP, JULY 30.

• INTERESTED IN HELPING
US 'PULL THE PLUG'?
YOU CAN DO SO BY
SHARING A SONG, A
WORD, OR JUST A HELPING
HAND...CONTACT
MARK C. OR ROB R BY
SUNDAY, JULY 23.



A Special Kind of Love Offering

The Rev. Cliff Morrison Memorial Apartment

The word Agape means Christian love, a love that is spiritual. Helping a person living with AIDS is just one manner of expressing that love. So we look to you for a special love offering by contributing to the Rev. Cliff Morrison Apartment at the Agape House.

We are on our way to raising the money for the initial down furnishings of the apartment. With more than \$800 towards the matching fund gift of \$1,000, the church still needs to raise thousands more. Everyone can help.

Agape House is an 18 apartment facility for homeless people living with AIDS. CMCC's plan to sponsor one of the rooms as a memorial to Pastor Rev. Cliff Morrison comes a year after his death.

According to longtime board member Dennis Luft, "one of the best ways to memorialize Cliff is by beginning this ministry through hosting a room at Agape House. Cliff was lucky to have a home, others are not."

Exactly \$7,500 is needed for the initial funding and 5-year maintenance on the apartment.

"We also plan to be personally involved with the persons living at Agape, providing opportunities for them to interact with people from the church's congregation," Luft added.



*AGAPE
House,
above,
will be the
home of the
Cliff
Morrison
Memorial
Apartment.*

Covenant TIMES

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Pastoral Leader, Tuscaloosa

Rev. Elect John Hankins

Student Clergy

Andy Mullins and Greg Bullard

Deacons

Cal M., Shirley C., Kay H.,
Cliff T., Mark B., Eddie M.

Newsletter Staff

John Foust, Co-Editor
Mark B. Moore, Art Director

Don't miss an issue...

- ☐ I'd like to have the COVENANT TIMES mailed to me monthly.
☐ I'd like to know more about your church. Please send me an information pack.

Name _____ Zip _____
Address _____ State _____
City _____ Send to: P.O. Box 101473, Birmingham, AL 35210

MARGE'S musings

BY REV. MARGE RAGONA

We've the wisdom to know when...

*"Which of you, intending
to build a tower, does not first
sit down and estimate the
cost, to see whether there is
enough to complete it.
Otherwise, when the founda-
tion is laid and the building
is not able to be completed,
all who see it begin to ridi-
cule."*

LUKE 14:28-29

There is a Persian fairy tale called *The Three Princes of Serendip*, which describes their faculty for making fortunate discoveries by accident and because of their extreme sagacity.

From it, we get our word serendipity for fortunate accidents. The Wedding Chapel was one of those fortunate accidents. We came together and liked each other, and now our host, Freeman Andress, has offered to sell us the chapel. If we are wise (sagacious), we will buy this building.

The church building was built as a Wesleyan church and for many years served that purpose. When the neighborhood changed, the Wesleyan congregation moved further to the suburbs, leaving a beautiful sanctuary building behind in a decaying neighborhood. Now that neighborhood is blighted, but slated for gentrification by many of our own community who live nearby and are trying to salvage

once beautiful old houses, stores, and buildings like this Wesleyan church.

We have an opportunity to be part of that story of progress. The building is in the process of being assessed for about \$200,000. We have \$39,000 in our building fund; we need \$50,000 as a down payment for any lending agency to consider us.

People have a way of saying, "Oh, the church is always asking for money!" Yes, it is. A truly growing church always needs money. We ask for money every month where there is a fifth Sunday; that money goes to help people in our community who are in financial need and have nowhere else to turn. It is not used to support the programs of the church. It meets a community need. We ask for money at Christmas to help BAO and the Christmas gift fund for people with AIDS. Recently, we have asked for \$2,500 for start up funds for an Agape House apartment in the name of Cliff Morrison. Cliff gave years of his life as pastor of this church, and was paid very little for many of those years. He died of AIDS, and what better way to remember him and his contribution to the stabilizing of Covenant than by making it possible for someone else with AIDS to live with dignity. We have asked that every third Sunday of the month people give to the Building Fund. We knew that one day we would need to own our own building, and we were being prudent about putting money aside for that month by month.

If you are behind in your building fund pledge, if you need to make a building fund pledge, if

you would like to see us own this building, if you have always wanted to give Covenant MCC a gift but didn't know what it would be used for, or if you would just like to help the gay community move forward and gain stability, this is your opportunity to do something worthwhile.

Right now, Covenant needs to raise \$11,000 for the down payment on The Birmingham Wedding Chapel. If you have not been to a service since we began worshipping here, please come and see the very beautiful building we have been offered. If you are a regular worshipper, please give to the building fund, and insure our ability to continue to worship here.

If we do not buy the building, someone else will! It is too beautiful a worship space for some church to pass up. It is perfect for us, and probably better than any church building we could afford in any other area. Besides which, it is in a neighborhood where many of our community are buying homes.

I hope you will make a one time, sizeable gift to Covenant. If eleven people would give \$1,000, 22 people \$500, or 100 people \$110, we could be on our way to owning this church building. A church is not a building; but a church needs a building to grow and flourish. Help us take that step. Your gift to this church community, your church community, can be the start of something wonderful for the gay community in Birmingham. It is a sign of our growth as a community that we are even considering this purchase. We need the entire gay community of Birmingham to help us continue that growth. ■

DEACON'S
diary

BY DEACON CAL MCCLOSKEY

Portrait of the
'Not-yet-ready
disciples'

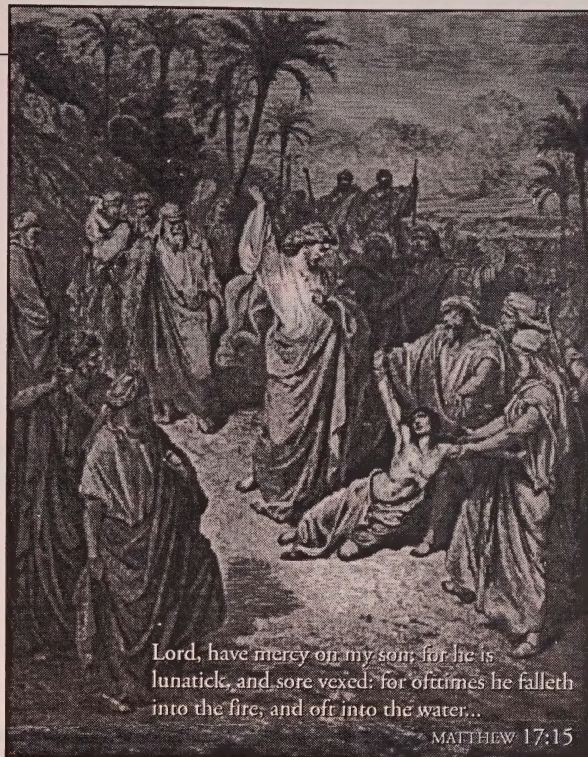
In Luke 9:37-43: "The next day, when they came down from the mountains, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.'"

"O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."

Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

I wonder if we might also be not-yet-ready disciples?

In verse 39 when the father states that a spirit seizes him. This evil spirit was causing seizures (Mat-



Lord, have mercy on my son; for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water...

MATTHEW 17:15

thew 17:15) and a speechless condition (Mark 9:17).

Evil spirits were responsible for many kinds of affliction. We are referred to study notes for Luke 4:33 and find the following: Verse 33 in chapter 4 of Luke states, "In the synagogues there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit."

The note tells us that to pagans,

"demon" meant supernatural being, whether good or bad, but Luke makes it clear that this was an evil spirit. Such a demon could cause mental disorder (John 10:20), violent action (Luke 8:26-29), bodily disease (Luke 13:11, 16) and rebellion against God (Rev. 16:14)

What kinds of demons or evil spirits can keep us from being not-yet-ready disciples? ■

MANY
voices

BY JOHN FOUST

Recovery

Our ways still sleep in the underworld of soul,
bound by those who in fear fought us long ago.

And still they fear the misfit whose brash thoughts run wild,
Leap free, break through to realms more golden and grand.

Merciless in greed, they break the legs of waywardness,
Cripple and defile, wield the power for its sake alone.

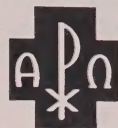
No fatherly book can contain even a shred of our mystery.
We must hunt our hearts, find the histories and legacies.

We must walk within, go down deep through corridors,
and listening hear kindred voice our truths and ancient joys.

With steady beat, with dance and flickering fire we bring
the deer, the mammoth, and the saber tooth from stone.

They are ours, these freedom children, these exile gifts embraced;
Make us fleet, make us strong, make us hunger for the Truth.

When that Trinity breaks into light, Its force carries us up,
And we know we cannot be denied, and we claim what is ours.

LAITY
speaks

BY STEVE PARKER

General
Conference

Atlanta, Georgia
July 23-30, 1995

Things you need to know

Sydney, Australia is the proposed site for the next General Conference, so you better load up this year and go to Atlanta. General Conference is like the best District Conference...times ten!

In preparation for Conference, we will hold a Congregational Forum on Tuesday, July 11 at 8 p.m. to discuss resolutions and bylaw changes that your Clergy and Lay Delegates will vote on at conference. Issue of importance to the local church will be addressed.

At conference, there will be worship services, which you *do not* have to register for, and workshops which you *must* register for. Weekend or full registration also gains you access to meetings and receptions

Everything takes place at the Westin Peachtree Plaza, the 70-story glass hotel downtown at 210 Peachtree Street.

Can't attend the entire week's programs? here are more options.

**Sunday, July 23
6 p.m.**

Opening Worship Service
CMCC Choir performs,
Rev. Elder Hong Tan preaches

See **Conference** on page 4

Conference

continued from page 3

Friday, July 28**7:30 p.m.**

Evening Worship,
Ordination Service
Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson,
preaches

9:30 p.m.

Gospel Concert

Saturday July 29**9 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.**

Sixteen concurrent workshops

Later that day...

"God With Us" Praise and
worship celebration

Sunday, July 30**10:30 p.m.**

Closing Worship Service
Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry
preaches



Congratulations to two couples as they celebrated Holy Union in the company of God, friends and family.

Cheri and Carol McKinnon exchanged vows June 24 at CMCC in a ceremony that was beautiful in all ways from the nervous and joyous expressions to the Bride's gown.

In Tuscaloosa, Amanda and Tricia exchanged vows June 30 in what was described as a lovely ceremony.

Indeed summer is a time for these events...

Experiencing God's love through our church, our family, our friends, and now through each other, we Dottie Cook and Tish Smith would like to extend an invitation to share in the celebration of Holy Union at 1 p.m. on Aug. 6. at CMCC. Reception follows in the familyship hall. RSVP (205) 553-8854.

MANY VOICES

BY GARY G.

Through a glass darkly

EDITOR'S NOTE I was glad when a brother here at Covenant came forward and offered this testament to us. Many of us have been through hardship, and so it lifts us up when we hear how one in our midst has prevailed.

John Foust.

Battling ALS (Lou Gehring's Disease) for over a year, my mother died. It was the day after her 80th birthday on July 29, 1994.

For the entire year, she had been unable to talk and communicated by writing. She was determined to continue her life as full as she could make it—acting as the nerve center of her home and doing what she could for her church.

Our family had always been active in church. When I was growing up, we were there every time the doors were open. My parents taught young married couples. My mother showed throughout the years a deep concern for the young.

The Baptist church we grew up in was ultraconservative and my parents reflected that conservatism as well. I can remember that my dad would not even water the grass on Sunday. And once, he burned a deck of cards that someone had given us. So the possibility of my gayness was not even mentioned, and I was told that those who were, could not possibly be loved by God.

I was 29 before I began to realize that there were other people in the world that felt the same way I did. But for the next 13 years I was never able to talk to my parents about it because I knew that they would never understand. I'm sure that they wondered, but nothing was ever said. During those 13 years, I was involved with BAO, the Quilt Project, and the 1993 March

on Washington. But basically I kept a low profile in Birmingham because I feared how knowledge of my being gay might affect my family.

The last four weeks of my mom's life were a struggle for her. Getting out of a chair, walking, and swallowing were almost impossible. In spite of this I didn't realize that her condition was worsening quickly. But two weeks before she died, she and I went to Jacksonville, Florida. I loaded up the car with her wheel chair, walker, and our dog to visit the Mayo Clinic. It was her wish to get another opinion because there was some controversy of the diagnosis she had received in Birmingham.

We stayed in a hotel across from the clinic for four days. I believe she was glad to be there, but she was getting worse every day. That four-day stay was an ordeal. I tended to her every need. I fed her as she tried to force food down. I bathed her as she held to the hand rails. I dressed her for the hospital visits. I put her to bed at night and watched as she became a different person: restless and sometime almost hysterical.

But now I see that the ordeal of those four days was a valuable time for both of us. I think the legalistic religious garbage that had burdened her for many years, started to fall away as I did my best to care for her.

On the third day she was unable to swallow any solid food. Even Ensure made her choke. By the end of the fourth day we started back. Hungry, determined, and tired she tried a little Ensure as we traveled. It was a mistake. But God found us a room when we had to stop somewhere in south Georgia in the middle of the night so that

she could sleep and recover a little from her choking.

Four days after we got back, the hospital staff put a tube directly into her stomach to feed her. It was supposed to strengthen her. Maybe it did for a while. My mother and I celebrated her 80th birthday in the hospital room. My Dad and brother were not arriving until the next day. The celebration was a simple but meaningful ceremony. I brought two cupcakes, one with an 8 and one with a zero candle just as she had done on her father's and mother's birthdays. We lit the candles and blew them out. How could I have known she was so close to death? I went to work.

When I finished work that night around 11 p.m., I returned to the hospital room. My uncle had left shortly before I arrived. My mother's call button had fallen onto the floor, and her bed was wet. I picked her up out of the bed and sat her up in a chair.

I couldn't get a nurse to help and couldn't get her gown off over the I.V. line. I got some scissors at the nurse's station and cut the gown from her. I put a dry gown on her. I changed the bed. I put her back in. Then we looked at some birthday cards that she had received. All this was done in silence. Even communication through writing was not possible now because her hands were swollen and could not hold the pencil steady. I will never know what she wanted to say that night.

I felt so tired. Since everything seemed under control, I told my mother I was going home to sleep. She nodded OK and waved good bye. When I returned the next day, she was moving into a coma, and

Celebration *Gay Pride Style!*

Rev. Marge Ragona waves to onlookers from CMCC's rainbow float during the 1995 Gay Pride March.

Later that day the choir performed in the park and Ragona challenged listeners to join with one another and strait allies in the fight for equal rights.

V. Jon Nivens



Cyber Surf



Covenant Times and the Internet

Have a submission for the newsletter?

Send it to Mark Moore at Purple PV3@aol.com.

(That's just Purple PV3 for America Online users).

JULY 1995

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
2	3	4 Sopranos needed for the choir. Practice resumes next week.	5	Bible Study 7 p.m. 6	7	1/8
9	Board Meeting 7 p.m. 10	Choir Practice 6:30 p.m. 11 Congregational Forum 8 p.m.	Study Course Healing Distorted Images of Self 7 p.m. 12	Bible Study 7 p.m. 13	14	15
Newsletter Deadline Building Fund Offering Day 16	17	Choir Practice 6:30 p.m. 18 Deacon Training 8 p.m.	Study Course Healing Distorted Images of Self 7 p.m. 19	Bible Study 7 p.m. 20	21	22
General Conference opens in Atlanta Covenant MCC Choir sings at 6 p.m. service 23	Usher/ Greeter Training 7 p.m. 24	Newsletter Production 6 p.m. 25 Choir Practice 6:30 p.m. Deacon Training 8 p.m.	Study Course Healing Distorted Images of Self 7 p.m. 26	Bible Study 7 p.m. 27	28	29
5th Sunday Singing Community Assistance Fund Offering 30	Deacon/ Staff Meeting 8 p.m. 31	Every Sunday Sunday School for adults and children Morning Worship Worship (Tuscaloosa) Program rehearsal Evening Worship				9:30 a.m. 11 a.m. 4 p.m. 5:30 p.m. 7 p.m.

"THE MOST GUTSY, CONTROVERSIAL FILM OF THE YEAR!"

-Susan Granger, CHRISTIAN RADIO NETWORK

"A TRIUMPH! ONE OF THE BEST AND MOST PROVOCATIVE FILMS OF THE NEW YEAR!"

This powerhouse takes hold, shatters your prejudices and stuns you with its wicked humor, passionate romance and stirring moral force. *Linus Roache* gives a thrilling, deeply felt performance."

-Peter Travers, ROLLING STONE

"AN ELECTRIFYING POWERHOUSE OF EMOTION!"

Linus Roache is the best actor since Ralph Fiennes.
He is a major discovery."

-Rex Reed, NEW YORK OBSERVER

"★★★★★! ASTONISHING!"

Passionate and hypnotic."

-Bruce Williamson, PLAYBOY

"THE MOST ENJOYABLE FILM SO FAR THIS YEAR!"

-John Powers, VOGUE

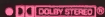


PRIEST

ONE MAN IS ABOUT TO CHALLENGE 2000 YEARS OF TRADITION.

MIRAMAX FILMS PRESENTS A BBC FILMS PRODUCTION A FILM BY JACQUES DOUMERGUE LINUS ROACHE TOM WILKINSON ROBERT CARLISLE CATHY TYSON
ANNA PRICE JOANNA NEWBERRY RAYMOND LANGHORN SUSAN SPIVEY FRED TANNIES
ANDY ROBERTS MARK SHIVAS JIMMY MCGOVERN JOSEPHINE WARD GEORGE FABER ANTONIA BIRD

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GADSDEN CINEMA 4

Special Admission Price \$3.50

Fri, July 14 - Thur, July 20
Nightly 7:00 & 9:30

One Week Only!

July 14-20

An ambitious, young priest finds his faith, as well as his morality, greatly tested from the moment he arrives at a poor Liverpool Parish. Learning that a fellow priest is a hard-drinking socialistic cleric who is openly involved in sexual relations with the church maid is only the first of many discoveries that force Father Greg to look closely at himself and his choices. The consummation of his own homosexual relationship and the horrific confession of an adolescent girl force him to face the most difficult moral dilemma he could imagine.

GADSDEN CINEMA 4

301 North 12th Street, Gadsden, Alabama
Movie Line (205) 546-3777
Customer Service (205) 547-6007

Group reservations will be accepted.
Please call the theatre customer service
number for more information.

SPECIAL ADMISSION PRICE \$3.50

MANY
VOICES

BY SUSAN WALKER

Neighbors? A Prayer

You say, "THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD...
AND THY NEIGHBOR..."

we say, "who is our neighbor?"

God, we call you Creator Parent

they call you: Divine Light, Elohim, Allah, Mother, Almighty Father

You Created us all; your children... *neighbors?*

Jesus, we see the man suffering in a ditch along life's road

You Describe the "good Samaritan":

a social outcast, scorned minority,

(Were Samaritans 10% of the population? with compromised freedom?)

The Samaritan stops to care for the hurting man.

(Could be white? heterosexual? wealthy? baptist?)

You challenge us... **Here is your neighbor.**

Holy Spirit, we hear the rushing sound of your presence on Pentecosts' Pride Day

You Touch everyone with fire

You Pour over all flesh:

women, children, gay men, "straight"

You Speak through each one powerful love and grace... *in their own language.*

Holy Trinity, forgive us of "we" and "they" isms.

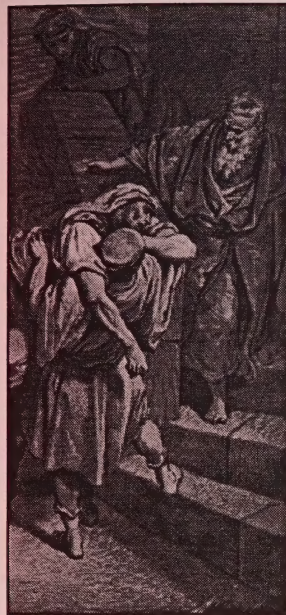
forgive us for being mutually exclusive.

forgive us for valuing only one language—ours.

forgive us, so that we may also forgive.

Grant us the grace to love our Neighbors..

as we love ourselves. AMEN

The Arrival of the
Good Samaritan

[He] brought him to an inn, and took care of him...

LUKE 10:34

Glass

continued from page 4

shortly after midnight she slipped away.

At Christmas about four months later, my father died as well. He was 86. He was a good provider, but he never knew that I was gay. I do not believe he would ever have understood. But time passes and my healing has begun. Two incidents show this.

The first incident occurred while I was looking for comfort and inspiration. A book jumped out at me at the Lodestar Bookstore: *Mel White's Stranger at the Gate... To Be Gay and Christian in America*. As I read the book, I could hardly put it down. Among the things it helped

me to realize was the importance of being involved in Covenant MCC. MCC has provided strength, encouragement, and love at a time when I've needed it most.

The second incident occurred as time approached for this year's Gay Pride parade. I thought that at least this year my parents in their new life would completely understand that I could be gay and Christian. I felt proud as I marched with Covenant MCC in the parade. A scripture that I had heard often as a child kept going through my mind: "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face."

The verse comes from the 13th

chapter of I Corinthians. This is what that chapter was saying to me at the parade.

For now our knowledge is incomplete and our prophecy is incomplete.

But when the whole truth is known, then that which is not truth shall pass away.

For when I didn't know the whole truth, I spoke as one not knowing the whole truth, Understood as one not knowing the whole truth, And thought as one not knowing the whole truth.

But when I came to know the whole truth of the love of God for all I put away the untrue ideas.

For now on this earth those that

don't understand us see through a glass darkly. But one day all will see God face to face.

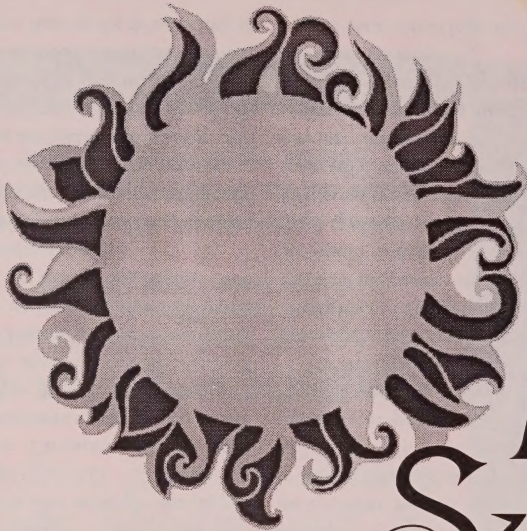
Now they know the truth in part, but then they shall understand fully the love of God even as we fully understand the love of God for all.

So faith, hope, and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

My prayer is that more people while on this earth will be able to see more clearly the love of God for all; that they won't have to wait until they see God face to face to understand the complete truth that God made, accepts, and loves each of us just as we are. ■

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Have Some
Summer
Fun!

EXTENSIONS

The Newsletter of the Tuscaloosa Parish Extension of Covenant Metropolitan Community Church

April 1996

Volume 1, Issue 1

For the Community

Special Easter Service & New Worship Time

The Tuscaloosa Parish Extension of Covenant Metropolitan Community Church is happy to announce a special morning service for Easter Sunday, April 7, at 11 a.m. in our usual location, the Tuscaloosa Holiday Inn. Don't forget that Easter is the first day of daylight savings time. "Spring forward" one hour.

Also, the church has decided to permanently move its worship time to 11 a.m. on Sunday mornings as of Sunday, April 21. Services will still be held the Tuscaloosa Holiday Inn. Sunday, April 14, the service will be at 4 p.m. due to a previously-scheduled Holy Union at 5:30.

The church is always interested in your opinion. Please let us know how you feel about these changes. Leave a message at 345-2044 and someone will return your call.

You're Invited To A Wedding

The Tuscaloosa Parish Extension of Covenant Metropolitan Community Church will celebrate the Rite of Holy Union April 14 at 5:30 p.m. at the Tuscaloosa Holiday Inn.

Joanna and Diane will be joined in Holy Union by Rev. Marge Ragona, the pastor of Covenant MCC.

All are welcome to attend!

The Tuscaloosa Parish Extension
of Covenant Metropolitan
Community Church

***Bringing news of God's
all-inclusive love to
West Alabama.***

Meets:

Every Sunday at 11 a.m. at the
Tuscaloosa Holiday Inn.

Contact:

(205) 345-2044

Tuscaloosa Parish Extension/CMCC

POB 101473

Birmingham, AL 35210

Positive Changes

In addition to changing service time, seeking to become an independent congregation, and our new newsletter, the Tuscaloosa congregation is looking into issues such as purchasing new hymnals, finding permanent meeting space, enhancing our music program, and creating a more effective community outreach. If you have ideas in these or other areas, please let us know.

Our Church, Its History, & Its Future

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches was founded in 1968 by the Rev. Troy Perry in Los Angeles, CA, as an affirmative atmosphere in which Christian lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and the transgendered could practice their faith. Since then, the denomination has grown to a global membership of more than **30,000**, including **six congregations in Alabama**.

The Tuscaloosa congregation is a "parish extension" of **Covenant MCC** in Birmingham. It was started by a number of Tuscaloosa residents who had been traveling to Birmingham to attend services there. The Tuscaloosa group began weekly meetings in **November 1994**.

It is our hope to become an independent church very soon. In order to do this, we need 20 official members. A six-hour **inquirer's class** will be held April 20 for anyone interested in becoming a member.

For more information about the church or the class, call **345-2044**.

POB 101473
Birmingham, AL 35210



The Reverend Mother
911 G Valley Ave
Birmingham, AL 35209

P.O. Box 101473
Birmingham, AL 35210

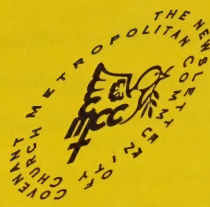


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C O V E N A N T Times

M A R C H 1 9 9 6

'We Worship

As One'

**Almost 200
came together
to worship and celebrate
Covenant MCC's
15th Anniversary**



He prompted us to look at our own diversity. "You've got a black man for a vice moderator, a white woman for a pastor and a hippie for a choir director!"

Rev. Elder Troy Perry's statement may have brought laughter from the 182 people in attendance during morning worship Feb. 18, but it truly emphasized one of the themes he expressed during Covenant MCC's 15th Anniversary celebration.

The diversity we hold mimics that of the first MCC group. When Perry held his first service, present were nine men, a woman, a person of color and a Jew.

Perry described that first group, the fear and uncertainty he felt in answering God's call to form this denomination and his hopes for the next generation of gay and lesbians in MCC.

Like many he too held phobias concerning computers, but expressed the importance of pushing aside those fears and taking full advantage of today's technology as an empowering and evangelistic tool. He painted a mental picture of how the Internet could be used to form a web of resources and information for MCC and people looking to find out more about our denomination.

In addition to speaking at morning worship and at the Saturday night banquet, Perry made an appearance at the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual College Conference of the Southeastern United States at the University of Alabama.

The other events of the weekend included a moving concert by Atlanta's Carolyn Marshall, a book signing with Troy, entertainment from Atlanta's Gospel Girls, the building dedication and a Sunday afternoon concert featuring John Marberry and Chris Griffin.

**FORGING
NEW
ALLIANCES**

Photo: Allan F.



**Rev Elder Troy Perry
and Rev. Jay Neely
joined Rev. Marge
Ragona (left) in
dedicating CMCC's
recently purchased
worship facility**

**15 Years
AND
Growing**
ISAIAH 40:31
1996 HOPE

Covenant Times
PUBLISHED BY
Covenant Metropolitan
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John Foust
CO-EDITOR
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ART DIRECTOR, CO-EDITOR

Faced with daily fear, we need each other.

Faced with daily alienation, we need unity.

Faced with a hostile world, we need each other's love.

MARGE'S MUSINGS

A mission based on three...

Owe no one anything except to love one another;

for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (1 Corinthians 13:8)

by Rev. Marge Ragona

Evangelism, Christian social action, and community, these are the three things that UFMCC is built on. First is the reaching out to anyone and everyone who needs to know that God loves us and accepts us — that's what the church, any church, is all about. It's what Covenant is all about. Too many of us have been introduced only to an angry, vengeful, judgmental God. But that's the picture the Bible presents of God when God is grieving because the people have turned away. How many of us have been in relationships that have gone sour and all we remember of our partner is what happened at the end. If that's all relationships ever were, we would never want another one. But with time, we remember the good things, the sweet things, the gentle and loving things and we begin to want those again, and we reach out and allow ourselves to love again. That's what a relationship with God is like. Sometimes the Bible does present God as angry, but it's when God's love for the people is rejected. More often, the Bible presents God as loving and waiting for us to come home, as in the story of the Prodigal; or it even presents God as out looking for us as in the stories of the woman searching for a lost coin or the shepherd looking for the one lost sheep. Evangelism

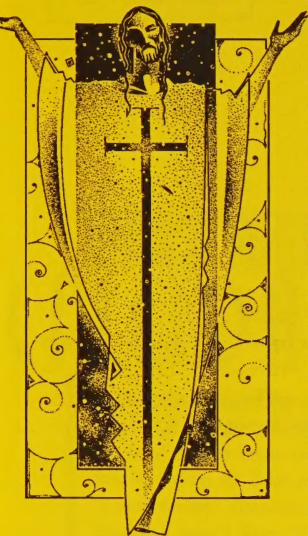
in MCC is all about looking for the ones who have wandered away and need to be found. It's about the love God has for all people.

Secondly, MCCs are about Christian social action — the work of the church in the community. It's about social action, political action, and community action. It's about taking care of real needs in a real world. Today's political leaders are trying to drive wedges between people, not bring them together. Races and national groups are being set against each other. Political leaders are trying to gain votes by appealing to people's worst fears of people who are other than us. Racism, xenophobia (fear of strangers), and homophobia are being played up as reasons to vote for straight white people who can take us back to an America that never really existed, but was all the straight white people saw, because everyone else was hidden from view. MCCs are about looking at our communities and seeing hunger and homelessness — some of it among our own people and trying to do something about it. It's why we support Agape House and support an apartment for a person living with AIDS who needs a home. It's about giving money to organizations that help meet the needs of people with AIDS. It's also about our own giving of money to people in our commu-

nity — gay parents, people burned out of their homes, people who are ill who need a helping hand. And it's about taking political stands, not for particular candidates but for political ideas that benefit our community — in this case, the gay community.

The third thing MCCs are all about is providing a sense of community for each other. Too many of our people are isolated. When we get outside our gay ghettos and go home, how many of us know that there are other gay people nearby? Many of us live in areas that would be hostile if they knew we were gay. Many of us have reason to fear putting a pink triangle or a rainbow sticker on our cars. Faced with daily fear, we need each other. Faced with daily alienation, we need unity. Faced with a hostile world, we need each other's love. That, in part, is what MCCs try to provide. A loving central core, where people can come together, gain a sense of community, gain strength, and then go out to do the daily battle with society. Outreach, Christian social action, community. If that kind of world appeals to you, try us. It's what we are trying to be in the community we live in, the world we live in, the church we live in. It's the kind of loving community most of us have been looking for and some of us have found at Covenant. Join us.

Resurrecting Our Lives



of TV with an hour of worship on Sunday nights might make a difference.

Pray passionately. Okay, everyone "believes" in prayer, but we think about it more often than we do it. During Lent, find a way to pray an hour every day. Begin in the shower each morning. While your hands wash your body, ask God to cleanse your heart and mind. As you drive to work, pray for those in your life who are on this journey with you. No one has extra time, but we can all find creative ways to use the time that we do have.

Practice kindness. Work to eliminate negative words, criticism and cynicism from your vocabulary. Ask the people you live and work with to help you be faithful. Try to anonymously do something kind each day for someone you might not normally like. Let a car pull out in front of you, give your place to someone else in line, find all the ways you can to live with the kindness and civility of a Christian.

Give generously. As we always do in Lent, we are asking every member to try tithing for 40 days. It is amazing how much good can be done if we decide to live on 90 percent of our income and give 10 percent away. The greatest good that is done is in our own life.

Live with devotion. Do something to increase your devotion. People often give up something for Lent. In a world where we are always taught to "take" and "get", giving up something can be transformational. George Bernard Shaw said once, "The teachings of Jesus have not been tried and found lacking, they have been found difficult and left untried." For 40 days, experiment with authentic Christian living and see if Easter doesn't bring new life.

See you outside the empty tomb.

Worship faithfully. There are two services offered each week. During Lent, try to attend at least one each week. Perhaps it would enrich your life if you added Thursday Night Bible Study to your schedule for the next 40 days, or maybe replacing an hour

NOT
LEAST

East Alabama Bible Study begins in March

Residents of Pell City, Lincoln, Anniston, Gadsden and surrounding areas take note. Lincoln will be the site for CMCC's newest Bible Study, beginning Wednesday, March 13. Richard Barham, clergy in formation, will facilitate the study. Call 599-3363 for additional information

Worth a thousand words... or more.

Even as we celebrate the growth of our denomination, we must note that we are in the infancy of that denomination. Each event is a milestone. And at these events the shutters snap and camcorders record, but then what? Walter and Richard have volunteered to head up a new ministry at CMCC as historians. Contact them if you can contribute to CMCC's pictorial and electronic history. Call 599-3363.

Fifth Sunday Singing

Continuing a CMCC tradition, the deacons are organizing the March Fifth Sunday Singing Service. The 7 p.m. service will feature dramatic readings and music around a Lenten/Easter theme. To participate talk to one of the deacons. Don't miss this special evening.

Common Ground

Because gays and lesbians continue to come out of the closet at younger ages every year, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance of Alabama and Covenant MCC join to host a coffee house, Common Ground, for people age 25 and younger each second and fourth Friday from 7 to 10 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

Excel? Why me, God?

by Deacon Peg

How about a weekend in the North Carolina mountains in the mission village of Valle Cruses? No phones, no demands, your meals served to you—you will be loved and pampered. All you need do "is go." (Sound familiar Moses?)

We all have our own experience with the concept of God. Are you satisfied with yours? Does it bring you joy and hope, and an eagerness to be used? If not, then maybe Excel...

The weekend breathed joy into my spirituality. It let my smile reach from my soul and up to my eyes. I received the grace that God has for me. I left the weekend with certainty in my heart of God's love for me.

Excel is intended to renew us individually and personally. When I allowed myself to relax with the thought that this is my weekend to receive God's love, I was able to open myself to that very grace. I felt the awesome power of Christian love flow through me.

Excel didn't make me perfect. It has however been instrumental in my joyful commitment to strive for a more *excel* lent way.

This weekend can be for you too!

Are you hungry for the Spirit's blessings? Do you lack that little nudge to reach outside yourself to God's love.

"Why me God?"

"If not you, then who? Who will share my love?"

Will you go? Will you receive and will you respond to God's love with love?

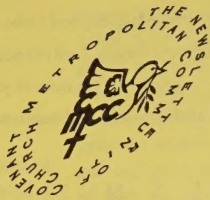
"If not you then who?"

"Just go, Moses. I will be with you."

A decorative border in the top-left corner featuring a black and white illustration of a vine with leaves, small flowers, and circular motifs.

Spring's Almost Here





C O V E N A N T Times

J U N E 1 9 9 6

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Homosexuality and the Bible workshop

Want to learn more about Covenant, our denomination and what the Bible really says, or doesn't say, about homosexuality? Then attend this all-day Inquirer's Class Saturday, June 1 from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. Lunch will be provided. These classes also meet membership requirements for those wanting to join the church.

Gay Pride Picnic

It's a potluck of sorts, and a wonderful chance to have some fun in the sun Gay Pride weekend in Birmingham. Join us Saturday, June 8 at Rushton. Food will be served at 5 p.m., but join us earlier for volleyball and softball. To help with the food, call Greg at 326-6222.

June 'Teenth

On June 23 at the 11 a.m. service, Rev. LaPaula Turner, longtime MCC pastor and advocate for African-Americans in Metropolitan Community Churches, will be our visiting preacher. LaPaula is a wonderful speaker and singer and will share with us some of the history of June 'Teenth, the anniversary of the delivery of the Emancipation Proclamation to the slaves in the United States. She will, of course, couple that with speaking about justice and freedom for all people. Come and hear this dynamic speaker.

Karen Ann is coming soon

Saturday, Aug. 10, at 7 p.m. Karen Ann Edwards will be in concert at Covenant. Many of you know and have heard Karen Ann previously. She will be bringing a new concert of songs of faith and hope. Remember to put this on your calendar and save the evening for her concert.



Book, Music, and Lyrics by

Dan Goggin

Five nuns decide to put on a variety show to raise money to bury their four dead sisters who were accidentally poisoned by the convent's cook's Vichysoise soup. Great songs! Lots of laughs!! Lots of fun!!!

The cast includes Mark Cobb, Tim Liptak, Debbie Tate, Stevie Hoven, and Mark Moore. Walter Lee Allen, II directs. Performances are Thursday and Friday, June 6 and 7 at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, June 8 at 2:30 p.m. in the sanctuary. Tickets are \$5.00 per person, can be purchased in advance or at the door. Everybody come and bring friends!!!

DO SOMETHING
DIFFERENT
THIS PRIDE WEEK

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. **But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.**

Amos 5: 21-24

MARGE'S MUSINGS

Can our vote count?

by Rev. Marge Ragona

Covenant Times

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It's Gay Pride month again all over America. Parades, picnics, special worship services all commemorate a small group of gay men in New York City who decided they would not take police oppression one second more and rebelled. All around us the Religious Right (which really is neither) assembles to impose on this country restrictive laws on our persons. But we have *hope*. Small things give us courage and small decisions tell us that not everyone agrees with them.

Recently, the Supreme Court voted 6-3 not to uphold Colorado's Amendment 2. Passed in 1992, Amendment 2 was a statewide ballot initiative that banned the state of Colorado and any political jurisdiction within its borders from passing or enforcing laws to protect civil rights based on sexual orientation. The lesbiantransgay community now has the same rights to be protected as all other citizens of Colorado. But that's only Colorado.

All over America we are looking at electing officials to *serve us*. It's what they do. They serve the populace. We are part of that populace. It is clear that if this

country is going to provide equal rights for all of us, we must elect *our* representatives in November and also elect a President who will appoint judges who will judge fairly. Unjust judges have existed from biblical times. Amos decried them. We must insure that in a democracy we elect the fairest people possible, or democracy does not work.

I seldom use this space to talk politics, but sometimes — especially during Gay Pride month — I begin to think politically. What kind of country do we want to live in. Do we want to live in a country with repressive laws that singles out some of its citizens for unjust and unfair treatment. We had that with slave laws in the 1700s and 1800s and Plessy vs. Ferguson as late as the 1890s, which empowered the majority population to treat unjustly and unequally the African-American people of this land. It was overturned much later with emancipation and Brown vs. Topeka School Board. But there was a legacy of mistreatment which has taken and is taking generations to undo.

New laws would repress us and

treat us unequally. We must not allow that. And only we can assure that will not happen. Our name is legion — there are many of us. Are we smart enough and strong enough to vote as a bloc and *as a people* to prevent our own oppression. As I see it that's what Gay Pride narrows down to. Our people taking care of our own needs in the political arena. We can wave flags and do our thing in the streets and say we have come out. The place to really come out is in the voting booth. (By the way, OutVote '96 is the first gay political convention. It is being held in Chicago, August 16-18. Some of us need to go and be trained to help mobilize progressive people to get involved in the political campaign of 1996, think about taking your vacation in Chicago this year! Maybe some of us could help fund a GALAA member to go!) Let justice roll down like water and goodness like an everflowing stream. Vote against your own repression and for your own freedom. No one can do it for you. Happy Gay Pride! Go and do something about it!



*Mark Allen Cobb
&
Timothy Martin Liptak
Invite you to join them
As they exchange vows of
Love & Commitment
In a Service of
Holy Union
Half past 7:00 on the evening
of Saturday, June 1, 1996*

*Dale B.
&
Jerry W.
cordially invite you
to join with them
for their Holy Union
and
24th Anniversary Celebration
June 28, 1996 at 4:00 p.m.
reception follows*

Wilder each day

by Deacon John Foust

Eleven years ago, I felt a great sense of freedom as I worked toward my MFA in painting. Not only did I feel free, but I was moving toward a goal which to me at the time was shining and bright. Little could I have known then that today I would be writing about an even greater freedom. A freedom found not in the beauty of image and color, but a wilder supernatural freedom of heart that grows wilder each day.

In a way my freedom is like the freedom the Disciples felt as Jesus pushed them ever closer to that brink where they were finally forced to give up their early expectations and finally let go to fall into His embrace. Can you imagine what it was like on that last night in that place above the street, the upper room. The sky, prominent with the new moon and the evening star, invades the room mixing with lamplight to give a luminescence to the whole event. And in that starlight and glimmer they would let go—they had no choice.

The sounds and cares from the streets float up, but the disciples are high, safe, and away with their teacher. For a while, time stands still and the disciples strain in their human way to understand what is happening to them. In response to the unknown flooding in, some are angry, some obstinate, others anxious about events. But overlaying all of this all have one emotion in common: How they yearn to understand, yet how they resist. Like us in our own spiritual journeys we fear, yet the journeys have begun, and there is no turning back. We find we must trust, open our hearts, and face the unknown with joy. Once we say, "Your will be done," we have signed the covenant and we must fulfill our part.

The disciples were in turmoil, even there in the presence of the Lord. They faced human decep-

tion almost at the very moment of their enlightenment. In spite of the fact that everyone in the room had lived in close association with Judas Iscariot for three years, they apparently suspected nothing. "Who is it?" they inquired.

Even today we as a scattered tribe (but growing stronger) we know about the disillusionment we occasionally feel about human nature: dashed hopes about lovers, broken dreams about family, the pressure of living in exile: the list is long. We know too well how the apostles must have felt. Not only was there a traitor among them, but one of the apostles who really believed, Peter, was told that he too would play the part of a coward and ingrate as the sun came up the following day.

A lot of us today are like Peter. We puff up and are indignant with the thought that we are not strong enough. That there is a chance we might fall away from our spiritual journey is something that we do not like to think about. We, like the apostles that night, say in soft undertones "Apparently we can't trust ourselves."

Jesus knows us. Jesus has known us from our conception in our mothers' wombs. Jesus loves us and with a smile asks "Whom can you trust? Why, you can trust God and you can trust me: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me."

Jesus began his leave-taking in the upper room in earnest. But he said, "I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

And we know this to be true today, nearly 2000 years later. How often in church and even on the sidewalks of our everyday world we feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. Just this week I listened to the torment and anger and saw the tears

of a man who in a desperate attempt for freedom is thinking of giving up a loving wife and children to find some kind of freedom. As his anguish spilled out, my heart went out to him. I felt a warmth and comfort spilling into me and through me into him. The Holy Spirit buoyed me up and I was able to boost the man's spirit as well.

I do not think this is an uncommon thing among Christians. We, indeed, just like the disciples are given the gift to heal. Even though injured, we all can. Do not doubt it. Why, even in the act of healing another, we are healed.

Jesus gave the disciples the truth they needed. Jesus gives us the truth we need as well. And through the Holy Spirit in us we can transmit God's healing power to others. It is the Holy Spirit itself who is the answer to our questions, the solution to our problems, the allaying of our anxieties. It is not so much what the Spirit gives or what the Spirit whispers to us today with the sound of wings, or even what the Spirit has done, but Christ moving in us this very moment. The living Christ. The Christ right here in these words which are entering your heart at the very moment of this reading. Like Jesus, the Holy Spirit is sitting with us. The teacher. The Advocate. The Quiet Voice that promises us special joy and happiness in this world and a greater joy to come.

The Holy Spirit still says to us today "I am the way, the truth, and the life." If we can open our hearts and believe this, suddenly the world's cares vanish and in the vacuum our hearts expand and suddenly we are filled with a freedom through which all things are possible. Joy in this tired world. Yes, it is possible. I can attest to it. New strength. New possibility.

We can live in a world in which Christ is not the road marker, but the Road; not the truth teacher, but the living Truth; not the life-giver, but the Life itself. And not just a way among others, but the only Way; not one facet of truth, but the living Truth; not one way of Life,

but Life itself.

Jesus was telling the disciples then and he is telling us today, "I am writing a new covenant with you." And what is our contribution in this partnership? It is simply to ask. How can asking be a contribution? Have you ever thought that that which is our part in the partnership is a complete dependence on God. It is God who is working, even in our work. What a blow this is to human pride, a frequent cause of stumbling. There is absolutely no place for pride in this new covenant with God. Simply ask. That is all we need to do. And when we ask, Christ will indeed become the Road, the living Truth, and Life itself.

Yes, each of us, loved, found beautiful even though we are stained with earthly life are empowered to reach out and lift up others. There will always be the others, the hungry, the abused, the isolated, but because God works in us and is the work the victory is ours. As the scripture says "You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of God who called you out of darkness into Christ's marvelous light."

NOT LEAST

Positions Open

■ SHOE Committee

Chair. We are still in need of a chair of the SHOE Committee (Social, Hospitality, Outreach, and Evangelism). Needed is a person with organizational skills, ability to enlist volunteers, and willingness to work with a diverse group of people who love to cook, and even some hardy souls who like to clean up. Apply to the pastor or the vice moderator of the Board.

P.O. Box 101473
Birmingham, AL 35210

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Covenant

T I M E S

September 1994

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO ATTEND
THE INSTALLATION OF
Rev. Marge Ragona
AS PASTOR OF
COVENANT METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

11 a.m.
September 25, 1994

REV. JAY NEELEY, OFFICIATING
DISTRICT COORDINATOR, GULF LOWER ATLANTIC DISTRICT
UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

CMCC tops 100

Four new members bring roll to 103, with others waiting

By Mark B. Moore

She had told herself she wouldn't get emotional, but as she herself said, "One of the greatest moments for a pastor is welcoming new members."

Pastor Rev. Marge Ragona cried while calling the names of four new members Aug. 14.

And with the four new members a milestone was achieved—Covenant welcomed its 100th member and started the count toward 200.

"It is especially moving when two of the members are our children," she said. Two of the four are teenagers.

The growth Covenant is experiencing is manifest in several ways. Moving to a larger building and taking in more than a dozen members under the new roof are just physical examples. Covenant is growing in a spiritual way, with members healing themselves and the church body reaching out to the community.

"People are seeing the connection between the spiritual and the political; the spiritual and their sexuality; and the spiritual and their emotional life—it's all connected and God is in the center of it all," says Ragona. "We're mov-

ing to a deeper sense of who God is and who we are, and enjoying the connection."

The increase in membership also gives Covenant a second vote at District and General Conferences in the form of an additional lay-delegate.

This extra vote is key for Covenant as the church continues to play an active role in Fellowship business.

CMCC has a history of active involvement says Lay Delegate Steve Parker.

See **Growth**, next page

*Marge's Musings***The Challenge to Accept Acceptance**

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us" (I John 4:10)

Everyone has a deep need to be valued, to be loved, to be accepted. When we are not accepted something in us is broken. Infants and children who are not loved seem to shrivel up and babies even die. Teens who don't feel loved become destructive of themselves and others. Many of us in the gay community know that a life without acceptance is a life in which one's most basic need goes unfulfilled. We all know the old hymn, "Just as I Am," and that's how we need to be accepted. Acceptance liberates us to become the unique people God intended us to be.

We have all been taught that we must love God. It is almost more important for us to know that God loves us. I John says, "This is the love I mean, not our love for God, but God's love for us." Faith is knowing that we are accepted by God. "We ourselves have known and put our faith in God's love toward us." At Covenant MCC, we not only learn to love God, but

learn that God loves us.

Tillich, the theologian, defines faith as "the courage to accept acceptance."

Why courage? When things go wrong or we are disappointed it is almost too easy to say, "How can God permit this?" We doubt the love of God. It takes courage to believe in God's acceptance no matter what happens to us. We all know the story of the person who slips off the edge of a cliff and starts to fall but grasps the branch of a tree. He yells, "God, help me!" and a voice answers "Let go." He starts to lose his grip, and yells, "God, help me!" and again the voice answers, "Let go." Once again, he yells "God, help me!" and again the voice answers, "Let go." And like too many of us, he asks, "Is there anybody else up there?!" It is hard to believe that God cares about us and would not let us fall. It is hard to accept God's acceptance of us, mainly because we cannot accept ourselves. Self-acceptance is an act of faith. When I

know that God loves me, I must love myself. I cannot be more demanding than God. Isaiah's picture of God is a God who loves at all times — even when Israel turns away from God.

"Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing.

For God has comforted the people and will have compassion on those who suffer.

But Zion said, "God has forsaken me; my God has forgotten me.

Can a woman forget her nursing child and show no compassion on the child of her womb?

Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

See, I have carved you on the palms of my hands." (Isaiah 49:13-16)

God knows us by name. We could not, even if we wanted to, run away from God. God comes seeking us out. Jesus pictures God as a shepherd with ninety-nine safe sheep and one lost one for whom the shepherd goes looking, and rejoices

when he finds that lost sheep. That is the picture of a God who loves us, seeks us out, tells us that we are engraved on the palm of God's hand.

Most of us cannot love like that, and so we don't believe anyone could love us like that; but God does. We need to have the courage to accept God's acceptance of us. We need to let go and jump, knowing that God will catch us. We need to let down the barriers between ourselves and God's love for us. Emotionally, we will be healthier and will give ourselves space to grow into the unique individuals God made us to be. Relationally, we will not be as demanding that our relationships meet our every need. Spiritually, we will begin to heal and be in a safer place with God. Let God love you and remember that your name is carved on God's hand and God cannot forget you! Accept God's love of you and accept yourself as you are and continue to grow into who you can be.

Rev. Marge Ragona

Growth

continued from previous page

Parker also notes the good timing of acquiring this additional vote.

"Issues on the near horizon revolve around Fellowship Salary guidelines

for Pastors of chartered churches (which we will be within the next year or so), and restructuring of the systems and structures of the Fellowship. Restructuring

of some sort is advisable to make our fellowship equitable from the standpoint of being an international body, and economically accessible to all at the same

time, an awesome challenge. We will likely be electing another lay delegate in January so be in prayer about your decision."

Deacon's Diary **And Cliff Makes Four** God called me home

I come to CMCC by way of the Pentecostal Church. There, I served as a minister from 1979 to 1989 and held various positions ranging from pianist to clergy. And here, I am your new deacon. My name is Cliff.

In 1989, I left the church after many years of denying who and what I am, vowing never to go or

work in a church again. Wow, was I ever wrong!

Then in Oct. 1992, God told me to come home. It was then that I was diagnosed as being HIV-positive. After about four months of fighting, I came to CMCC. Here I have found the peace, joy and acceptance that comes with God's grace and love.

Someone once asked me

when the greatest part of my healing began.

My answer, "In Rev. Marge's 'Healing Distorted Images of God.'" classes.

Through those classes, I came to find a loving, caring and merciful God.

It is alright to be gay; and best of all, God accepts that, and why not, that's who we were made to be.

Cliff Timney

Perspectives

One Hundred and Counting A thankful father reflects

A great event happened in my life, the life of my family and this church, Sunday, Aug. 14. My beautiful daughter, after many weeks of thought, questions and puzzling looks, joined Covenant MCC and became its 100th member.

Many of our members will be thankful for this, because our church will have another vote at Conference. I agree that is very significant.

However, for our family, it's an even brighter beacon of light in what most days seems like an endlessly dark tunnel. The odds are not with the family these days. If you add the fact that this family is comprised of a single father and two teenagers (one who is a young

Republican with Rush Limbaugh as a hero and the other a 90s hippie) the odds are greater.

But then, if you dare to throw in the fact that the father is "artistic," those odds swell to the size of the Goodyear Blimp!

It's a different world today and the news events flashed across the television screen aren't pleasant.

So when we have time to stop and breathe, we need to reflect on the impact each of us can have on the rest of this lonely planet. It is amazing how that "swell" can be made to wither and fade on the vine.

Many of our church community have fought huge giants to get to where

they are today and many are still fighting. I can understand this because I have my own private set of giants to battle. However, I find my deepest strength just after pausing to reflect on the good things I am so blessed with — a daughter with commitment, laughter, big warm hugs, moonlight, the smell of fresh coffee in the morning, Hershey's chocolate candy bars with almonds and cheerful grins — just to name a few.

So with that said, I salute you my dear daughter! You have traveled a millenium with me or should I say in spite of me, girl! Praise be given for those lovely reflections of joy.

Phillip B.

Covenant TIMES

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Community Church

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Birmingham, AL 35210
599-3363

Worship Service
11 a.m. and 7 p.m.
Sunday School classes
10 a.m.

CMCC Staff
Rev. Marge Ragona,
Pastor
John Hankins, Student Clergy
Deacons
Cal, Shirley, Kay, Cliff
Newsletter Staff

John Foust, co-editor
Mark B. Moore, art director
Marcus A.
Timothy B.
Timothy W.
Phillip B.
Allan F.

EDITOR'S NOTE **Submissions?**

Anyone interested in submitting to the newsletter should approach John Foust or myself. We accept a variety of writings and also assign articles as needed.

If possible, please turn in your submission on diskette (5 1/4" or 3 1/2") formatted for IBM, and saved as an ASCII file.

We also need help with various aspects of production from typing to proofing to folding.

Interested? Call 823-9320 for more information.

—Mark B. Moore

*Perspectives***We Are the Early Church**

EDITOR'S NOTE *After prayer and consideration, and to my joy, John Foust has accepted my offer to become co-editor of the Covenant Times. John is a talented and experienced writer. Please join me in welcoming him.*

When we look back over our lives to find those pivotal events and choices that changed the direction we were going, we all see loss, grief, healing, and growth.

I grew up in a Christian home. I accepted without question my parents' beliefs. These beliefs sprang from Methodist roots that began in the last years of the Eighteenth Century. I was a twig that branched from the trunk high up on the Foust tree. I had no choice; I was a part of that giant, old tree.

I thrived. I was nurtured by the stories and wisdom passed to me from my grandparents. I remember fondly those summer afternoons when I vacationed with them. They pulled from old books the pictures of my ancestors and related the pivotal events of their lives. They instilled in me a reverence for saving the best things of the past and discarding debris.

When I went to college, I still lived in innocence and

had discarded nothing. I did not know the world. I carried with me still the ideals of my youth. Two events occurred in that first college year that changed the course of my life.

First, I met Jim. He was a man far more knowledgeable of the world than I. Looking back, I can see distinctly his pursuit of me. The pursuit culminated one evening in the woods at Oak Mountain in the back seat of his car. I can remember even now the smell of damp, fall leaves and his warmth. It was my first adult sexual encounter, and I moved from innocence into adulthood in the space of a few hours. My gayness fell into place; it seemed natural; I have never pursued any other kind of physical love.

The search for spiritual love did not come so easily. This search began with the second major event of my first college year. It was the first of a sequence of religious events that have shaped my life. I took some basic philosophy courses. I saw how all philosophers, ancient and modern, grappled with worldly chaos and attempted to make sense of it.

Each sought wisdom. I was inspired. I would find wisdom too. Challenging

my Methodist beliefs, I began the pursuit of wisdom with a headlong dash into pleasures ranging from forbidden books to Chianti wine. I had the energy and enthusiasm of youth to begin the break with my past.

This break from Methodist upbringing continued. Finally I converted to Catholicism because the Catholic church was old and had roots that went all the way back to St. Peter and Christ. But the old church has changed much from those early days even though it says it has not. It does not heed its roots. In the end, it did not give me the nourishment and sense of community I needed even though I searched everywhere.

I have found community here at Covenant. Community was evident the first time I attended a service at the storefront three years ago. I received through this family, although they may not have known it, healing balms and love. I was able to express my loss of a spouse and let grief and tears flow unashamed before God.

Can you believe it? In the confines of that small, humble room, at the very moment my healing began, I received Christ's love. Quickly severed from the

old, I moved from apathy to a new, fervent tree. Like my first love at Oak Mountain, my conversion was swift and complete.

It was a miracle. I was a member of a new family. I, the twig from the old Foust tree, had been grafted to a new tree.

Today, I feel new, expansive, brave. I feel like I want a new name! Some of the innocence of my boyhood has returned but is tempered now with the wisdom flowing up from the new tree. Covenant and the Metropolitan Community Churches to which it belongs are the early church, the new tree. I know now it's what I sought when I first rejected the Methodist tree in my first college year.

Like the early Christian communities that grew new from the rot of Corinth and Rome, we grow new from the moral decay of our cities. It is amazing to me that the mother church in Los Angeles and Covenant in Birmingham could spring up in response to those cities' corruption and thrive. Only God could do such a thing.

In the persecution and injury that our society daily rains down on us, we gather in community for shelter,

See Foust, next page

*Perspectives***The Round Dance Floor**

During the March on Washington, in 1993, I got an invitation to a party at the Hilton. What I saw then stays in my memory and provided me with a vision of life for gay men. The party was quite wild, the music excellent and the dance floor round, the youngest and prettiest dancers in the middle where the lights were concentrated. As you looked at the periphery of the dance floor, men were older, more subdued, the oldest ones were quiet and still, hidden in the darkness of the border of the stage. They even seemed ashamed of being there.

Decades of fighting for gay rights have allowed us to have a space of our own. A gay male in a large American city can find plenty of other gay men, gay bars, sport leagues,

common interest groups, churches. Most of us, can be comfortable at our workplace, granted, still in the closet, but comfortable, anyway. I dare to affirm that most gay men are not really being actively discriminated against by their straight peers and in the realm of social activities, as I said above, we can find a space of our own.

Back to the figure of the dance floor, there is an active discrimination and exclusion going on in the gay community, is the exclusion of the old, the ugly, the sick, the HIV-positive, exerted by gay people on gay people. The stage for this discrimination is that space of our own, the places where we have fun, socialize. It is a product of America's worship of youth, physical beauty and

health, to which the gay community is not immune. Worse, still, the gay press does not mention it, or at least it does not give it the importance that it should.

This discrimination is morally wrong and not Christian and we cannot ignore it at our Church. At an individual level it should be a matter of personal examination. As a community, we have a wonderful opportunity for creating a space for gay people where this kind of discrimination has no place. I cannot help quote Acts 2:44-45, "The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceedings among themselves according to what each one needed." For me, this means that we should not

be afraid of spending too much time together, having too many potluck dinners, too many parties or going out to eat together too often, but always actively reaching out to our brothers and sisters on the periphery of the dance floor.

I came to know this church after five years in Birmingham, five years during which I have myself excluded other gay men and felt excluded myself. How many wasted nights sitting in silence in the darkness of by the walls of the local bars! I wish somebody had told me about this church before. We should go out and invite all gay people in Birmingham to come to a place where everybody participates in the dance, where nobody has to watch from the dark.

Mauricio Botero-Vélez.

Foust

continued from previous page

strength, and confirmation of our purpose.

Is it not shelter when we can sit with God as a community and know holy love? Is it not strength, when our bright voices rise in freedom songs against the clouded murmurs of the world? Do we not find purpose when we know deep

down we will teach the world true Christian love even though the world screams, kicks and will not suffer our touch.

Our young family tree grows in the winds of change and signals YES to all these questions.

John Foust



'Hang me up!'

September 1994

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 7p Bible Study	2 Pastor's Day Off	3
4 10a Sunday School 11a Worship 7p Worship	5	6 6p Choir	7 7p Special Study Course "Healing Grief"	8 7p Bible Study	9 Pastor's Day Off	10
11 10a Sunday School 11a Worship Deacon Installation 7p Worship	12 7p Board Meeting	13 6p Choir 7:30p Excel: Sharing with Friends	14 7p Special Study Course "Healing Grief"	15 7p Bible Study	16 7p Fun Night Pastor's Day Off	17
18 Second Offering* 10a Sunday School 11a Worship 7p Worship	19 7:30p BAO service (call for info)	20 6p Choir	21 5:30p Youth Meeting	22 7p Bible Study	23 Pastor's Day Off	24 9a Choir Workshop
25 Pastor Installation 10a Sunday School 11a Worship 7p Worship	26 6p Deacon/Staff Meeting	27 6p Choir	28	29 7p Bible Study	30 Pastor's Day Off	

Building Fund Goal

Every third Sunday, CMCC will take two offerings. One will be the regular offering and the other will be specifically for the Building Fund.

This will be a perfect opportunity to keep up your building pledges or drop in a few extra dollars toward this fund.

Our goal is \$50,000 for downpayment on a building. The Building Fund now stands at \$31,000.

BAO Food Drive

Covenant has had success with the new way of gathering items for the Birmingham AIDS Outreach Food Pantry.

Don't forget to bring your items for this month.

- Sept. 4** Tuna Fish
Sept 11 Beef Stew and Chicken & Dumplings
Sept. 18 Macaroni and Cheese, spaghetti, rice
Sept. 24 Carnation Instant Breakfast, Ensure, or the like.

Faster than you can say, 'Troy Perry'

Make your plans now to attend the Gulf Lower Atlantic District (GLAD) Conference in Wilmington, N.C., Nov. 11-13.

Featured speaker will be Rev. Elder Troy Perry, UFMCC founder. Marsha Stephens will be there, too.

Wilmington is a beautiful resort on the Atlantic coast. Call 1-800-662-9338 or 910-763-5900 and re-

serve under GLAD or MCC. Room rates are \$60 per night plus tax.

Map mileage to Wilmington is 566 miles via I-20 to Florence S.C. and U.S. 76 on to Wilmington. Estimated driving time is 10 hrs. 36 mins per the atlas.

Remember, November will be here faster than you can say, "Troy Perry."

Steve Parker



Bible Stories & Fairy Tales

A spiritual retreat in the mountains...
Covenant Metropolitan Community Church
5TH ANNUAL SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Cheaha State Park
Saturday, September 10
8:30 a.m.—8:30 p.m.

A TIME TO enjoy a beautiful morning drive through God's mountains ... to be nourished by God's word ... and to nourish and be nourished by others ... to familyship with friends ... through prayer ... study ... worship ... sharing ... food and fun ...

BRING yourself ... significant other ... friends ... Bible ... paper and pen ... brown bag picnic lunch and sodas for the day ... extra clothes, a white shirt and towel if you plan to be baptized ... lawn chair or blanket ... fruit for a community fruit bowl ... an open and willing mind and heart ...

EVERYONE WELCOME ... no one turned away ... suggested donation for the day is \$5 per person, \$10 per family as you are able and as you are felt led ... let us know how many people you include in your family unit ... dinner is included ... Cheaha charges a fee of \$1 per person for state park use for anyone ages 6 and above ... sign up at church or call 956-6418 and leave a message...

DIRECTIONS ... take I-20 East ... exit 191 ... Hwy 431 ... right ... approximately 5 miles ... follow signs to state park ... follow signs to campground ... turn right past lake through gates onto dirt road ... look for a

large pavilion on the hill from the lake ...

IF YOU DECIDE you want to camp Friday or Saturday night, call 1-800-846-2654 as soon as possible ...



Pothourri

The Last Page

Bears for BAO

Every year it seems that Christmas comes earlier and earlier.

We can beat the shops and malls to the punch with our own yuletide cheer by buying a bear for BAO's Adrian Daniel's Memorial Holiday Gift Box Project..

BAO prepares more than 300 gift boxes that go

to people living with AIDS and children.

Other gifts can be donated instead of stuffed bears, such as colognes, personal care items and the like.

For more information on this project contact Judy Briggs at 322-4197.

More Help Wanted

Covenant has a variety of programs that need committed people at the helm. Read over the list of open positions. Pray. And then see Rev. Marge if you are interested in helping.

Familyship/Socials

Director

(gift of hospitality needed)

Evangelism/Outreach Director

Sunday School teachers (pre-school—3rd grade)

(4th—7th grade)

(adult: 30 and above,

alternating Sundays)

Children's Church

(teens and adults needed)

Children's Choir Director

He balanced nature with the trees and the tiger

And he cursed man; never to be idle.

He made the earth complete with sonic boom

And it to rhyme with the planets in lunar tune

He is Lord, our God: Milky Way.

The sun was born with a blink of his eyes

He beat his chest and the thunders cried.

He smote his rod and divided the day from night

He stepped back and all was good and right.

He's the Lord, our God: Milky Way.

Let's take a break from our routine today

And see the Lord upon the Milky Way.

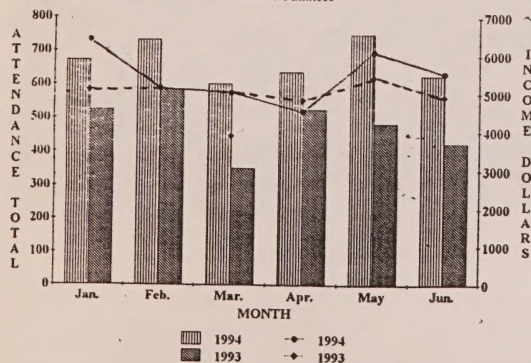
The trip will be intriguing and unique.

Unlike anything we have ever dreamed of...

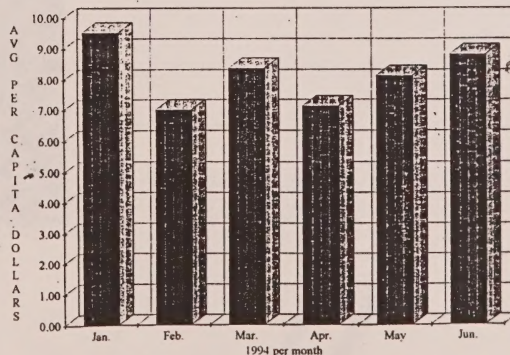
In our sleep...In our sleep...In our sleep.

Timothy B.

MID-YEAR REPORT
Attendance/Finances



Average Giving
per attendee



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**Forward and
Address Correction**

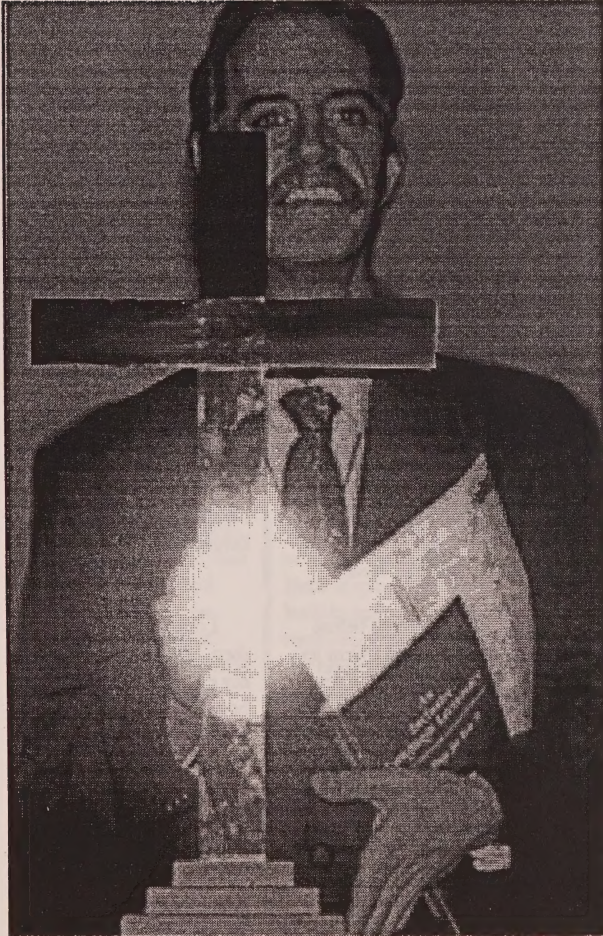
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THE NEWSLETTER OF COVENANT METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

Covenant T I M E S

July 1994



Rev. Clifford P. Morrison
1947-1994

Farewell...

Farewell...

Rev. Clifford P. Morrison

We offer these few words and a wealth of prayers expressing the love and respect we felt for the artist, actor, singer, preacher, teacher, pastor, brother, son, spouse and friend named Clifford Morrison.

he died upon a summer's day

he died upon a summer's day,
after fighting death's dark fray,
yet peace and consolation were,
facts that his face would confer.

his passing was a mighty loss,
to all those who knew him most,
his friends were many, enemies few,
a man of god – that, all men knew.

courageous to the very last,
that his style would soon be passed,
seemed most obvious to all,
what a loss to those he'd called.

a wordly man, yet called by god,
this a feat not very odd,
for the power of god is strong,
to bring to light those in the wrong.

a strong man too, this too was true,
an inspiration for all to view,
a man of strength and resolution,
strong in every situation.

a man of compromise when needs arose,
the truth he'd never see foreclosed,
role of peace maker this great man,
would take the role of peace in hand.

outspoken, when the need arose,
speaking for our rights verbose,
proud of who and what he was,
he had taken up his cross.

so in silence we respect,
the joy that his life'd reflect,
and mark the passage of this man,
who had heard his lord's command.

—Steven Mark Fountain

One of Cliff Morrison's greatest talents was that of being an all-around theatrical professional. For example, he was a fine lecturer and an even greater pastor, but one part of himself that he never fully showed to his congregation was that of a set designer. Yes, yes, the plays he did at Covenant were very nicely staged indeed, but those of you who didn't get to see the backdrop for *Sunday in the Park with George* (a 200 sq.ft. recreation of a George Sarat painting) or the sliding stages of either *The Winter's Tale* or *Tuxedo*

Three weeks before Cliff died I went to Southern Progress and visited old friends, one of whom was a special woman who I used to laugh and joke and ponder with when I worked there several years ago. She was a joy to work with and we shared happy times and good feelings. Her name is Nancy Ogburn. She is Cliff's sister.

It wasn't until the funeral that we found out that we both knew that special man she called brother, and I called friend and teacher.

Junction may have never seen a whole facet of Cliff's person and genius. Music, painting, acting, writing, directing, composing and conducting all were at Cliff's command, and he tried to use the many talents God gave him to glorify his maker. I now know more than ever that Cliff is safe, and I know (almost as if I heard his voice at nights) that everything will be all right if I am working, loving, and living for Christ. I think that sense of peace and purpose is what Cliff most wanted for all of us—his parishioners, his beloved.

—Michael Raines

I didn't have the words then, but she looked into my eyes and acknowledged how much she knew Cliff had meant to us all.

Cliff was so many things to so many people. He was blessed with an abundance of talents in so many areas. And he was the type of person that you wanted to please. He recognized talents that people sometimes didn't even know that they had. Yes, of course, I will miss Cliff, but I will forever be grateful for all that he did for us.

—Mark B. Moore

Marge's Musings

Change...

Saul was one of the great tragic figures of the Bible. Saul was not ordinarily insane.

He suffered from anomic, the inability to adapt to change. Saul stood at a strange place in

history. He was the last leader of the old tribal federation at the end of the Copper Age. David, his nemesis, was the first king of the new nation of Judah and took his people into the Iron Age. Saul represents great leaders who are left behind by change. Saul also could not move from the old pagan ways into monotheism. He was a person, like many today, whose faith is inadequate to the demands of changing times, manners, and mores. Saul, in his proper time, had been sought out by God—God's hand had been on him. But he was caught between the old and the new and was unable to move. When he could not, God's favor was removed; Saul knew it, and he went insane.

Change is all around us. As a church we are moving into a new building, we have lost our pastor and eventually will have a new pastoral leader. Those are major changes for a church. There will be those who will look to past successes for a model. Someone is sure to say, "But we've always done it this way!" There will be

those thinking, "This is what succeeds at East Podunk Baptist or Church of God." Somehow, we have got to accommodate change. Thank God MOC is not our old church of origin. We wouldn't be welcome there unless we hid, and for many of us hiding is where mental illness started.

When we come out, many things change: expectations, roles, rules, even questions of morality are different. We ask and need answers to different kinds of questions. This leads to major changes. We must deal with the Bible and our homosexuality and come to a reasonable change in our old thinking or our faith will always have questions.

Many years for the older, simpler days when right and wrong were dogmatically stated and there were few grays. Our detractors are often of this kind. They cannot accept new psychological and moral truth and want to stop change. They have made us the bridge over which they will not cross. They sing songs about the

"old-time religion," preach about the "good ol' days," and yearn for things to never change. They are terribly frightened because they cannot keep up. At ninety, Shirley's mom can accommodate change and is a happy woman. Some younger folk cannot, and they are driving themselves crazy.

Jesus looked toward the future. He saw the coming of the reign of God and the changes it would bring. Some joined him. The Pharisees of his day rejected change. (So do the Pharisees of today!)

God does not change, but the will of God moves unceasingly forward. We will not return to our old church building. We already know we can fill the new building—it may not be large enough for the future. This may not be where we will stop. God leads us along. We are each other's companions on the journey—and as the hymn states, "The journey is our home." We will comfort each other when fearful, we will hold each other up when we falter, and we will be family for each other when, as the Psalmist wrote, "Even my mother and father desert me." Many changes face us. We must not be like Saul, but like Jesus who looked to the future. God knows our needs and will provide. Happy Moving Day. Go with God.

—Rev. Marge Ragona

Covenant TIMES

published by
Covenant Metropolitan
Community Church

5117 1st Ave. N.
P.O. Box 101473
Birmingham, AL 35210
599-3363

Worship Service
11 a.m. and 7 p.m.
Sunday School classes
10 a.m.

CMCC Staff
Rev. Marge Ragona,
Associate Pastor
John Hankins, Student Clergy

Deacons
Cal, Shirley, Kay

Newsletter Staff
Mark B. Moore, editor
Marcus A.
Timothy B.
John F.
Michael R.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Thanks...

The production of a publication is as exhaustive a process as it is a satisfying one. And no matter the size of the publication, the job is easier and more fun with the help of others.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Allan E, Mark B. and the choir for their help in folding and mailing our last newsletter.

And I want to thank those that helped with this newsletter or showed interest in working on future publications. In the coming months we hope to bring you new features, interviews, book reviews, poetry and more.

So, if you have an idea or want to help, just stop me or call 823-9320.

—Mark B. Moore

A call to serve

I entered Deacon training for the education—I was not seeking the diaconate. I did not think I was worthy of this responsibility—to be a servant of God's children.

While attending the training classes, I attended an Excel weekend. The combination of the deacon training and the Excel weekend, left me with the question of what did God want me to do. I spent a lot of time in prayer and study—the answer to the

question became apparent—action in the ministry of the diaconate.

I feel God has called me to work with God's children, one on one. To provide peer listening, hospital visitation, working with HIV-positive patients in their homes,

helping with the struggle of spirituality vs. sexuality, teaching and, above all else, praying with and for in times of need. I feel that as a deacon, I am here to provide any assistance or support to the pastor that may be needed.

In order to provide for others, I must continue to strengthen myself by prayer, study and action. I know now that when I don't feel I have the right words or know how to handle a situation that God leads me through,

that God always provides the words and the roadmaps to help me in any situation. I pray that I will always hear the quiet, small voice that leads my life.

Through the months of deacon training and the experience of the Excel weekend, my heart and mind opened up to the teachings of Christ and the call to serve my God in anyway I can. I pray that I will always be a willing servant to God's children.

—Deacon Kay

What is Excel?

In 1949, a Roman Catholic priest and a team of lay people founded Cursillo, an exercise in lay renewal. Since then the cursillo movement has spread around the

world. Thousands of people have experienced a deepening of their faith and involvement in the life of the church through cursillo. The Methodist Church calls it The Walk to Emmaus and the Presbyterians call it Living Waters.

In 1975, Rev. Richard Mickley adapted Cursillo as a one time special retreat for UFMCC's Los Angeles Congregation. That first weekend was so popular that

the group continued the weekends. Soon people throughout UFMCC heard about Excel and traveled to LA to attend the exercise. The name Excel comes from I Corinthians 12:31 "And now I will show you the most excellent way."

In 1980, Excel in the Redwoods, of the San Francisco Bay Area, formed and conducted their first weekend with the assistance of the Excel in the City of the

Angels team. This marked the beginning of the growth of the Excel movement. In that same year, Excel in the Desert, Phoenix, Ariz. formed. The word had spread that this program of lay education and renewal was not only needed but would make a positive contribution to the life of local congregations. The history of Cursillo in the early 1950s was repeated in Excel in the early 1980s.

Excel is an exciting weekend of renewal and spiritual growth. It is an exercise in Christian community living held in a setting that provides participants with a message and a method for balancing their personal spiritual life and an active

Christian life within their home church.

The Gulf Lower Atlantic District's first Excel team will hold its second Excel weekend Aug. 26-28. CMCC is fortunate that the location is just a little more than an hour away.

There is room for only 25 participants from the entire district, so sign up as soon as possible. Flyers are available at the church, just ask one of the deacons.

Cal, Kay and I, along with the rest of the team were in training for two years for Excel. We hope you'll join us for the weekend we have called Excel of the Rainbow Zebra.

—Deacon Shirley

The Best Is Yet to Come

An Interview with

Robin Cardwell

It was the first view, those ultimate first few seconds, when she saw the Grand Canyon that Robin Cardwell describes as being probably the best time of her life.

Susan, Kay and Shirley recently helped make the dream of seeing that majestic beauty a reality with a vacation to the Grand Canyon. "A little piece of heaven," she calls it.

As we talk I find a peaceful, confident, loving person, whose flame won't be snuffed out by fate. Ironically, her flame has only gotten brighter. It was just last Easter that a brain tumor was discovered in Robin. Then in August, two more small cancers were found. A surgeon was able to remove the two smaller tumors, but "the grand-daddy" tumor, as she calls it, remains.

There's a good chance, however, that doctors will be able to remove most of it the next time, if its direction doesn't change. She is hopeful as she is in remission now. Her faith is strong, and she believes the brain tumor will be used for God's glory. The love of Kay, Shirley and Susan has sustained Robin throughout this difficult time.

As she opens her past to me, it reads like a book of

pain and loss. She talks of a period when she didn't care about anything.

"I was on drugs and alcohol really bad." But a caring woman helped point her toward God's love. "God was there," she simply says.

Both her parents are dead. But it was the death of her mother that she found harder to accept. After battling a liver disease that resulted from childhood hepatitis, her mother's life was a constant touch and go. But then Robin and her mother left Alabama for Texas for a liver transplant. It was a time when the two of them grew very close. Her mother got better. But it wasn't to last. Doctors then found spots on the lungs of Robin's mother. "I remember a lot of the suffering," she recalls.

Time has softened the pain. She recalls more good times than bad. For when the walls truly fall down around her she hears her mother rocking in her chair.

"Many times God could have snatched me up," she says.

A car accident once left her in a ditch for three days.

During those three days, she remembers the sound of running water, and the voice of an ambulance driver, "ah, they're dead," he said. Then she recalls her entire life replaying inside her head. She experienced a dark tunnel, and a bright light, but doesn't really relate this to any New Age near-death experience. But through this and other experiences, it became clear to Robin—life has a purpose.

As we are sitting in a pew in the old church, someone interrupts us by coming to take away some boxes to the new church.

We resume our talk. Much of Robin's life tells stories of letting go and moving on. But moving on hasn't always been easy. Such was the case when her partner walked out of the door. The devastation she felt rings in her voice. The timing of this desertion coincided with the discovery of the tumor. She says she still loves that woman, but has let go.

I look around the church, and it seems as if Rev. Cliff should be here preaching. We talk of Cliff, his passing and her memories.

"I remember the time he came out in a cowboy outfit." She laughs.

But then her voice becomes soft and she tells me

of the many times on the phone that he had helped her hang on. Recently she caught herself walking to the phone to call that familiar number. But then she remembered that he wouldn't be there. It was at the cemetery that day, when she recalled one of their last conversations. "We're going to make it," he had said. Then she knew what he meant. Cliff did make it.

Modestly she tells me how her work as a graphic designer recently earned for her national attention. In a contest, she was selected second best graphic designer in the country.

Her life would have broken many people—the drug abuse, the deaths of her parents so early in life, the broken relationship, and the brain tumor.

I look into her eyes and I see God's love so clear. But then she says the words, the words that really got me. She says, "The best is yet to come."

Click. Off goes my tape recorder. "I think that's a good way to end this," I say.

—Marcus Allison

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I want to dedicate this article to Cliff Morrison. His love and belief in my writing meant so much. He believed in me when I couldn't believe in myself. I miss you my sweet friend...

NEWS, NOTES ETC.

Wednesday workshop to focus on grief and loss

A grieving and loss workshop begins the first Wednesday in August at Covenant. It will continue for five additional sessions every Wednesday thereafter. Meetings will begin at 7 p.m.

Each session is planned to heal those wounds brought on by grief and loss in a supportive atmosphere. Rev. Marge will lead the sessions in her usual loving and caring way.

The workshop is formed with the understanding that grief and loss occurs to every person. The wisdom of the Bible is used as the basis of each session. It, in fact, is the balm which begins the healing from grief and loss.

The workshop will be experiential and interactive. For example, experiences of grief and loss—no matter whether they are from death or missed opportunity—can be addressed to others who have gone through or are experiencing the same things you are feeling.

Come join if you have some old or new loss or grief you wish to get off your mind. Come join to lend your support to others going through the grieving and loss process.

—John Foust

Happenings

Don't miss this...

Big events mark the calendar at CMCC usually and July makes no exception with a special concert and a congregational meeting to vote in a new pastor scheduled.

Author of "For Those Tears I Died," also known as "Come To The Water,"

Marsha Stevens brings a ministry through song July 15 at 7 p.m. She started her musical career at 16 when she wrote that song and spent several years singing with The Children of the Day before coming out as a lesbian Christian 14 years ago. She and her lover

Suzanne McKeag will challenge your heart and lift your spirit with their message.

Then on July 24 immediately following morning worship service the congregation will meet and vote on calling the Rev. Marge Ragona as Covenant's new senior pastor.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
July 1994 Calendar of Events Covenant Metropolitan Community Church					1	2
3 11a Worship 5:30p Youth Choir 7 p Worship	4 Independence Day	5 6p Choir 7:30p Council of Ministries meeting	6 6p Public Relations Meeting	7 7p Bible Study	8	9
10 11a Worship 1p Potluck 5:30p Youth Choir 7 p Worship	11 7p Board Meeting	12 6p Choir 7:30p Excel: Sharing with Friends	13	14 7p Bible Study	15 7p Concert: Marsha Stevens	16
17 BAO Food Drive 11a Worship 5:30p Youth Choir 7 p Worship	18 7:30p BAO Service	19 6p Choir 7:30p Class: Communion Server	20 5:30p Youth Meeting	21 7p Bible Study	22	23 9:30a Inquirer's Class
24 11a Worship Congregational Meeting 5:30p Youth Choir 7 p Worship	25 6p Deacon/Staff Meeting	26 6p Choir	27	28 7p Bible Study	29	30
31 11a Worship 5:30p Youth Choir 7 p Worship	Watch this space for Youth Week and Bible School dates...					

Seven bathrooms

A time of change is upon us. While we still mourn the passing of Rev. Cliff, our pastor and friend, we look to the future. Two pertinent questions face us:

"Where are we going?" and "How do we get there?"

Easy part first, how do we get there? According to UFMCC and CMCC bylaws, the Board of Directors of the local church assumes full responsibility for the ongoing work of the church in the absence of the pastor. That does not mean that the board does all of the work, but rather that the board sees that it all gets done. Our board has enlisted Associate Pastor Rev. Marge to coordinate worship services during this time of transition. Our other programs are staffed by deacons, and other volunteers, and are ongoing. So, for now, the little church that could, can and is huffing and puffing right along God's track.

As soon as we become situated in our new building, our pastoral search committee will begin the process of accepting applications for the position of senior pastor. According to the bylaws, the search committee consists of, but is not limited to, the board of directors. District Coordinator Jay Neely suggests that a

workable size for a search committee might be eight members. The size of such a committee, however, is not specified in the bylaws.

The search committee takes applications for our Pastorate, screens them, and presents a suitable candidate to the congregation for approval. Then, at a duly called meeting, the congregation votes. If the vote is yes, then we have a new pastor. If the vote is no, then the committee goes back to work. How many of us must vote in the affirmative for a call to be accepted is usually up to the candidate, but a simple majority is all that is required.

Where are we going and what does all of this have to do with seven bathrooms? Traditionally, there are two kinds of bathrooms: men's and women's. That's it, no in-between, like it or lump it. Tradition says we must be one or the other. Not only that, but the men must be "real" men and the women, well it doesn't matter much about them as long as they know where their place is (such as the women's

bathroom). I think we all know what Jesus did to the traditions of his time. Maybe God is trying to tell us something by using that special number on us. Maybe there are other possibilities. Are we going to be a traditional church or a diverse church? An open church or a closed church?

To choose a pastor, we must first give some thought to our own personal vision for Covenant. We must then, having spent much time, effort and energy formulating and articulating our own vision, be willing to sacrifice it for the sake of a collective vision. Yes, I must be willing to sacrifice my vision for Covenant just as God asked Abraham to sacrifice his vision of an entire nation with Isaac. The key to this is our willingness to sacrifice our dreams and our visions and to trust the collective wisdom of Covenant, God's holy and chosen people. Trusting that the most dramatic part of the dream, the most beautiful part of our vision, those being the parts inspired not of our earthly minds, but inspired of the Christ dwelling within us, will be the cornerstones of our collective reality.

God is blessing us with seven bathrooms. How much room do we have in our hearts?

—Steve Parker, lay delegate

NEWS, NOTES ETC.

We have many accounts for memorial offerings

Inquiries to members of the Board of Directors and staff have indicated an interest in memorial contributions to Covenant. There are several CMCC funds available for making memorial gifts. Each can be designated directly by the giver. Of course memorial gifts are appreciated and a copy of your acknowledgment will be sent to the honoree (or survivor). Hopefully the memorial gift would be over and above one's tithe to the regular budget.

Undesignated gifts will be placed in the Building Fund, a capital accumulation account for the future purchase of property for CMCC. These funds cannot be used any other way.

Another needy fund is the Community Assistance Fund. This is operated by the pastor and deacons to give financial assistance to those in need.

There are other funds: The Piano Fund, for the purchase of a new piano; the Capital Equipment Fund, for the purchase of equipment outside the regular budget; the Scholarship Fund, for course work by student clergy in need; the District

See **Gifts**, next page

NEWS, NOTES ETC.

Gifts

continued from page 7

Conference and General Conference funds, for expenses of the church lay delegate(s) and pastor to those conferences; and the Anniversary Fund, to pay for activities related to our annual anniversary program.

Giving to programs in the Church that get funding from the regular budget need special approval from the Board of Directors.

A gift of actual material, supplies or equipment can also be credited to one's giving record. If it is an item that is usually funded from the budget, the church records will show it as a gift-in-kind.

—Allan E, treasurer

Member, poet's books on sale at local bookstores

Two collections of poetry by Mark Fountain are on sale at many local bookstores, including Lodestar, Smith and Hardwick and the Little Professor.

Mark has multiple personalities and he says that for the most part his poems are written from perspectives of his alternate personalities.

The first collection, *atmosfears*, is a group of poems that range, according to Mark's therapist, "from

See **Poet**, next page

Perspectives

Independence Day

About a hundred and fifty years ago the great narrative writer, abolitionist, and ex-slave Frederick Douglass was invited by a group of northern socialites to

speak at their posh Forth of July luncheon on the grounds. These white liberals and weekend activists expected to hear words which would reaffirm the justice of the United States' union. What they heard from Mr. Douglass, however, was his demand that there is no such thing as justice or independence in America.

What Frederick Douglass said that so shocked his public was that as long as the rights of one group of people are disregarded, all justice is perverted and distorted. If you just happen to be part of the privileged society, then you are guilty of oppression even (or rather, especially) if you do not take active steps to oppress others. Simply put, if you do nothing to propel justice for all people, then you stand in the way of truth and equality. As Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote from the Birmingham City Jail, "History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged

groups rarely give up their privileges voluntarily."

As we enjoy the sweatiest holiday of the year, as the sweet watermelon drips from our chins, as the barbecue is grilled to just the right tender sauciness, and as we observe the rockets' red glare, do not forget that we live as an oppressed people. We, too, have our song of American independence stifled in our throats. The night when Judy Garland's body was lying in state in Manhattan twenty-five years ago, was the same night that gay and lesbian liberation officially and publicly began. If it had not been for the men and women (many of whom were inspired by the loss of a hero) who were not going to be harassed by the cops once again—if it had not been for a bunch of frustrated, rioting dykes and queens at the Stonewall Inn, we still might not have any voice at all, even today.

I challenge each member and friend of

Covenant Metropolitan Community Church to go to the Civil Rights Museum across from the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Learn about the struggles of other peoples, so you won't continue to be part of the cycle of oppression and abuse. Learn the truths about the Bible so no one can steal God's word from you. And ultimately, I challenge everyone to look into your souls and find those places where you allow oppression and coerced dependence to reign. We can change our plight as gays and lesbians if we stop standing on the sidelines and demand justice for all.

As Irish nationalist Billy Bragg incites:

Stand up all victims of
oppression
For the tyrants fear your
might
Don't cling so hard to
your possessions
For you have nothing if
you have no rights.
Let racist ignorance be
ended
For respect makes the
empires fall;
Freedom's only privilege
extended
Unless enjoyed by one
and all.

—Michael Raines

MUSIC REVIEW

The Lion King (soundtrack)

MUSIC BY Elton John
LYRICS BY Tim Rice

Everyone has his or her favorite Disney film. Whether it is an old one like *Snow White* or a recent one like *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Little Mermaid*, or *Aladdin*, the Disney company has made lots of fine entertainment. With the release of *The Lion King*, many people are going to find a new favorite at their local theaters this summer. Obviously, if you have kids, you are going to see *The Lion King* sometime this summer, but here's the good news: you're probably going to love it—at least based on the music I've heard.

The soundtrack itself is a strong album; the songs "Circle of Life," "I Just

Can't Wait to Be King," and "Can You Feel the Love Tonight?" are all beautiful melodies and are performed just as in the film by the main characters. They are also each performed by the aging rocker Elton John in what could be some of his best studio efforts in years (and years and years). In fact, he probably outperforms the cast on "I Just Can't Wait to Be King" as he throws out some good ol' "Crocodile Rock"-styled music and sings with a edge that hasn't shown itself in a long time.

Finally, about the movie itself, I just can't wait. A tour guide at Disneyworld mentioned to a friend, "...Disney's ongoing tradition of taking classic tales and adapting them to the animated screen." Supposedly, *The Lion King* is loosely based on *Hamlet*.

An evil brother usurps the throne from the older king, and the young prince [Simba, the lion cub] must grow-up and journey towards his destiny. Curiously, many TV specials about the show have bluntly stated that *The Lion King* is a first for Disney—a completely original script. Anyway, I will follow actor Jeremy Irons' observations, however, because he has compared his character of the evil brother to both Iago and Claudius. Oh well, you know those English chaps—always talking about Shakespeare.

Anyway, with Whoopi Goldberg, James Earl Jones, and several other major talents, *The Lion King* will be at least a good film. Available now, the movie soundtrack rates anywhere from good to grrrrreat!!

—Michael Raines

Mr. Magic

He made the earth—
from an effervescent matter.
On that great day—
the people shall gather.
To learn their fate—
whether it be peace or fire.
He's a magician—
but his act is not for hire

He's Mr. Magic—
and nothing tragic ever becomes
of his handiwork.

He's Mr. Magic—
and he has the habit
of creating from the dirt.

—Timothy B.

NEWS, NOTES ETC.

Poet

continued from page 8

the sublime to the outskirts of darkness."

The second collection, *love psalms*, is a gender-free work of poems set in a religious setting that Mark says can be applied to various relationships like that between Christ and the church, Christ and the individual or two people in love with one another.

Each book costs \$16, or \$12.50 when purchased directly from Mark.

BOOK REVIEW

Adventures in Prayer

In her book *Adventures in Prayer* Catherine Marshall offers eight situations and eight model prayers that for her have proved to be effective. She expounds from the theory that prayer is asking for in *An Asking Prayer* to accepting blessings in *The Claiming Prayer*.

One prayer in particular, *The Waiting Prayer*, gives spiritual tools for those who are novices to prayer life and to prayer veterans who become impatient while waiting for answers. "Waiting certainly plays an enormous role in the unfolding story of God's relationship to man," Marshall says.

—Timothy B.

Next month:

Don't Be Afraid Anymore
by Rev. Elder Troy Perry,
UFMCC founder.

PO Box 101473
Birmingham, AL 35210

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Covenant T I M E S

September 1994

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO ATTEND
THE INSTALLATION OF

Rev. Marge Ragona

AS PASTOR OF
COVENANT METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

11 a.m.

September 25, 1994

REV. JAY NEELY, OFFICIATING
DISTRICT COORDINATOR, GULF LOWER ATLANTIC DISTRICT
UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

CMCC tops 100

Four new members bring roll to 103, with others waiting

By Mark B. Moore

She had told herself she wouldn't get emotional, but as she herself said, "One of the greatest moments for a pastor is welcoming new members."

Pastor Rev. Marge Ragona cried while calling the names of four new members Aug. 14.

And with the four new members a milestone was achieved—Covenant welcomed its 100th member and started the count toward 200.

"It is especially moving when two of the members are our children," she said. Two of the four are teenagers.

The growth Covenant is experiencing is manifest in several ways. Moving to a larger building and taking in more than a dozen members under the new roof are just physical examples. Covenant is growing in a spiritual way, with members healing themselves and the church body reaching out to the community.

"People are seeing the connection between the spiritual and the political; the spiritual and their sexuality; and the spiritual and their emotional life—it's all connected and God is in the center of it all," says Ragona. "We're mov-

ing to a deeper sense of who God is and who we are, and enjoying the connection."

The increase in membership also gives Covenant a second vote at District and General Conferences in the form of an additional lay-delegate.

This extra vote is key for Covenant as the church continues to play an active role in Fellowship business.

CMCC has a history of active involvement says Lay Delegate Steve Parker.

See **Growth**, next page

*Marge's Musings***The Challenge to Accept Acceptance**

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us" (I John 4:10)

Everyone has a deep need to be valued, to be loved, to be accepted. When we are not accepted something in us is broken. Infants and children who are not loved seem to shrivel up and babies even die. Teens who don't feel loved become destructive of themselves and others. Many of us in the gay community know that a life without acceptance is a life in which one's most basic need goes unfulfilled. We all know the old hymn, "Just as I Am," and that's how we need to be accepted. Acceptance liberates us to become the unique people God intended us to be.

We have all been taught that we must love God. It is almost more important for us to know that God loves us. I John says, "This is the love I mean, not our love for God, but God's love for us." Faith is knowing that we are accepted by God. "We ourselves have known and put our faith in God's love toward us." At Covenant MCC, we not only learn to love God, but

learn that God loves us.

Tillich, the theologian, defines faith as "the courage to accept acceptance."

Why courage? When things go wrong or we are disappointed it is almost too easy to say, "How can God permit this?" We doubt the love of God. It takes courage to believe in God's acceptance no matter what happens to us. We all know the story of the person who slips off the edge of a cliff and starts to fall but grasps the branch of a tree. He yells, "God, help me!" and a voice answers "Let go." He starts to lose his grip, and yells, "God, help me!" and again the voice answers, "Let go." Once again, he yells "God, help me!" and again the voice answers, "Let go." And like too many of us, he asks, "Is there anybody else up there?!" It is hard to believe that God cares about us and would not let us fall. It is hard to accept God's acceptance of us, mainly because we cannot accept ourselves. Self-acceptance is an act of faith. When I

know that God loves me, I must love myself. I cannot be more demanding than God. Isaiah's picture of God is a God who loves at all times — even when Israel turns away from God.

"Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing.

For God has comforted the people and will have compassion on those who suffer.

But Zion said, "God has forsaken me; my God has forgotten me.

Can a woman forget her nursing child and show no compassion on the child of her womb?

Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

See, I have carved you on the palms of my hands." (Isaiah 49:13-16)

God knows us by name. We could not, even if we wanted to, run away from God. God comes seeking us out. Jesus pictures God as a shepherd with ninety-nine safe sheep and one lost one for whom the shepherd goes looking, and rejoices

when he finds that lost sheep. That is the picture of a God who loves us, seeks us out, tells us that we are engraved on the palm of God's hand.

Most of us cannot love like that, and so we don't believe anyone could love *us* like that; but God does. We need to have the courage to accept God's acceptance of us. We need to let go and jump, knowing that God will catch us. We need to let down the barriers between ourselves and God's love for us. Emotionally, we will be healthier and will give ourselves space to grow into the unique individuals God made us to be. Relationally, we will not be as demanding that our relationships meet our every need. Spiritually, we will begin to heal and be in a safer place with God. Let God love you and remember that your name is carved on God's hand and God cannot forget you! Accept God's love of you and accept yourself as you are and continue to grow into who you can be.

Rev. Marge Ragona

Growth

continued from previous page

Parker also notes the good timing of acquiring this additional vote.

"Issues on the near horizon revolve around Fellowship Salary guidelines

for Pastors of chartered churches (which we will be within the next year or so), and restructuring of the systems and structures of the Fellowship. Restructuring

of some sort is advisable to make our fellowship equitable from the standpoint of being an international body, and economically accessible to all at the same

time, an awesome challenge. We will likely be electing another lay delegate in January so be in prayer about your decision."



Bible Stories & Fairy Tales

A spiritual retreat in the mountains...
Covenant Metropolitan Community Church
5TH ANNUAL SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Cheaha State Park
Saturday, September 10
8:30 a.m.—8:30 p.m.

A TIME TO enjoy a beautiful morning drive through God's mountains ... to be nourished by God's word ... and to nourish and be nourished by others ... to familyship with friends ... through prayer ... study ... worship ... sharing ... food and fun ...

BRING yourself ... significant other ... friends ... Bible ... paper and pen ... brown bag picnic lunch and sodas for the day ... extra clothes, a white shirt and towel if you plan to be baptized ... lawn chair or blanket ... fruit for a community fruit bowl ... an open and willing mind and heart ...

EVERYONE WELCOME ... no one turned away ... suggested donation for the day is \$5 per person, \$10 per family as you are able and as you are felt led ... let us know how many people you include in your family unit ... dinner is included ... Cheaha charges a fee of \$1 per person for state park use for anyone ages 6 and above ... sign up at church or call 956-6418 and leave a message...

DIRECTIONS ... take I-20 East ... exit 191 ... Hwy 431

... right ... approximately 5 miles ... follow signs to state park ... follow signs to campground

... turn right past lake through gates onto dirt road ... look for a

large pavil-

ion up the

hill from the lake ...

IF YOU DECIDE you want to camp Friday or Saturday night, call 1-800-846-2654 as soon as possible ...



Deacon's Diary And Cliff Makes Four

God called me home

I come to CMCC by way of the Pentecostal Church. There, I served as a minister from 1979 to 1989 and held various positions ranging from pianist to clergy. And here, I am your new deacon. My name is Cliff.

In 1989, I left the church after many years of denying who and what I am, vowing never to go or

work in a church again. Wow, was I ever wrong!

Then in Oct. 1992, God told me to come home. It was then that I was diagnosed as being HIV-positive. After about four months of fighting, I came to CMCC. Here I have found the peace, joy and acceptance that comes with God's grace and love.

Someone once asked me

when the greatest part of my healing began.

My answer, "In Rev. Marge's 'Healing Distorted Images of God.' classes.

Through those classes, I came to find a loving, caring and merciful God.

It is alright to be gay; and best of all, God accepts that, and why not, that's who we were made to be.

Cliff Timney

Perspectives

One Hundred and Counting

A thankful father reflects

A great event happened in my life, the life of my family and this church, Sunday, Aug. 14. My beautiful daughter, after many weeks of thought, questions and puzzling looks, joined Covenant MCC and became its 100th member.

Many of our members will be thankful for this, because our church will have another vote at Conference. I agree that is very significant.

However, for our family, it's an even brighter beacon of light in what most days seems like an endlessly dark tunnel. The odds are not with the family these days. If you add the fact that this family is comprised of a single father and two teenagers (one who is a young

Republican with Rush Limbaugh as a hero and the other a 90s hippie) the odds are greater.

But then, if you dare to throw in the fact that the father is "artistic," those odds swell to the size of the Goodyear Blimp!

It's a different world today and the news events flashed across the television screen aren't pleasant.

So when we have time to stop and breathe, we need to reflect on the impact each of us can have on the rest of this lonely planet. It is amazing how that "swell" can be made to wither and fade on the vine.

Many of our church community have fought huge giants to get to where

they are today and many are still fighting. I can understand this because I have my own private set of giants to battle. However, I find my deepest strength just after pausing to reflect on the good things I am so blessed with — a daughter with commitment, laughter, big warm hugs, moonlight, the smell of fresh coffee in the morning, Hershey's chocolate candy bars with almonds and cheerful grins — just to name a few.

So with that said, I salute you my dear daughter! You have traveled a millenium with me or should I say in spite of me, girl! Praise be given for those lovely reflections of joy.

Phillip B.

Covenant TIMES

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P.O. Box 101473
Birmingham, AL 35210
599-3363

Worship Service
11 a.m. and 7 p.m.
Sunday School classes
10 a.m.

CMCC Staff
Rev. Marge Ragona,
Pastor
John Hankins, Student Clergy
Deacons
Cal, Shirley, Kay, Cliff
Newsletter Staff

John Foust, co-editor
Mark B. Moore, art director
Marcus A.
Timothy B.
Timothy W.
Phillip B.
Allan F.

EDITOR'S NOTE Submissions?

Anyone interested in submitting to the newsletter should approach John Foust or myself. We accept a variety of writings and also assign articles as needed.

If possible, please turn in your submission on diskette (5 1/4" or 3 1/2") formatted for IBM, and saved as an ASCII file.

We also need help with various aspects of production from typing to proofing to folding.

Interested? Call 823-9320 for more information.

—Mark B. Moore

*Perspectives***We Are the Early Church**

EDITOR'S NOTE *After prayer and consideration, and to my joy, John Foust has accepted my offer to become co-editor of the Covenant Times. John is a talented and experienced writer. Please join me in welcoming him.*

When we look back over our lives to find those pivotal events and choices that changed the direction we were going, we all see loss, grief, healing, and growth.

I grew up in a Christian home. I accepted without question my parents' beliefs. These beliefs sprang from Methodist roots that began in the last years of the Eighteenth Century. I was a twig that branched from the trunk high up on the Foust tree. I had no choice; I was a part of that giant, old tree.

I thrived. I was nurtured by the stories and wisdom passed to me from my grandparents. I remember fondly those summer afternoons when I vacationed with them. They pulled from old books the pictures of my ancestors and related the pivotal events of their lives. They instilled in me a reverence for saving the best things of the past and discarding debris.

When I went to college, I still lived in innocence and

had discarded nothing. I did not know the world. I carried with me still the ideals of my youth. Two events occurred in that first college year that changed the course of my life.

First, I met Jim. He was a man far more knowledgeable of the world than I. Looking back, I can see distinctly his pursuit of me. The pursuit culminated one evening in the woods at Oak Mountain in the back seat of his car. I can remember even now the smell of damp, fall leaves and his warmth. It was my first adult sexual encounter, and I moved from innocence into adulthood in the space of a few hours. My gayness fell into place; it seemed natural; I have never pursued any other kind of physical love.

The search for spiritual love did not come so easily. This search began with the second major event of my first college year. It was the first of a sequence of religious events that have shaped my life. I took some basic philosophy courses. I saw how all philosophers, ancient and modern, grappled with worldly chaos and attempted to make sense of it.

Each sought wisdom. I was inspired. I would find wisdom too. Challenging

my Methodist beliefs, I began the pursuit of wisdom with a headlong dash into pleasures ranging from forbidden books to Chianti wine. I had the energy and enthusiasm of youth to begin the break with my past.

This break from Methodist upbringing continued. Finally I converted to Catholicism because the Catholic church was old and had roots that went all the way back to St. Peter and Christ. But the old church has changed much from those early days even though it says it has not. It does not heed its roots. In the end, it did not give me the nourishment and sense of community I needed even though I searched everywhere.

I have found community here at Covenant. Community was evident the first time I attended a service at the storefront three years ago. I received through this family, although they may not have known it, healing balms and love. I was able to express my loss of a spouse and let grief and tears flow unashamed before God.

Can you believe it? In the confines of that small, humble room, at the very moment my healing began, I received Christ's love. Quickly severed from the

old, I moved from apathy to a new, fervent tree. Like my first love at Oak Mountain, my conversion was swift and complete.

It was a miracle. I was a member of a new family. I, the twig from the old Foust tree, had been grafted to a new tree.

Today, I feel new, expansive, brave. I feel like I want a new name! Some of the innocence of my boyhood has returned but is tempered now with the wisdom flowing up from the new tree. Covenant and the Metropolitan Community Churches to which it belongs are the early church, the new tree. I know now it's what I sought when I first rejected the Methodist tree in my first college year.

Like the early Christian communities that grew new from the rot of Corinth and Rome, we grow new from the moral decay of our cities. It is amazing to me that the mother church in Los Angeles and Covenant in Birmingham could spring up in response to those cities' corruption and thrive. Only God could do such a thing.

In the persecution and injury that our society daily rains down on us, we gather in community for shelter,

See Foust, next page

Perspectives

The Round Dance Floor

During the March on Washington, in 1993, I got an invitation to a party at the Hilton. What I saw then stays in my memory and provided me with a vision of life for gay men. The party was quite wild, the music excellent and the dance floor round, the youngest and prettiest dancers in the middle where the lights were concentrated. As you looked at the periphery of the dance floor, men were older, more subdued, the oldest ones were quiet and still, hidden in the darkness of the border of the stage. They even seemed ashamed of being there.

Decades of fighting for gay rights have allowed us to have a space of our own. A gay male in a large American city can find plenty of other gay men, gay bars, sport leagues,

common interest groups, churches. Most of us, can be comfortable at our workplace, granted, still in the closet, but comfortable, anyway. I dare to affirm that most gay men are not really being actively discriminated against by their straight peers and in the realm of social activities, as I said above, we can find a space of our own.

Back to the figure of the dance floor, there is an active discrimination and exclusion going on in the gay community, is the exclusion of the old, the ugly, the sick, the HIV-positive, exerted by gay people on gay people. The stage for this discrimination is that space of our own, the places where we have fun, socialize. It is a product of America's worship of youth, physical beauty and

health, to which the gay community is not immune. Worse, still, the gay press does not mention it, or at least it does not give it the importance that it should.

This discrimination is morally wrong and not Christian and we cannot ignore it at our Church. At an individual level it should be a matter of personal examination. As a community, we have a wonderful opportunity for creating a space for gay people where this kind of discrimination has no place. I cannot help quote Acts 2:44-45, "The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceedings among themselves according to what each one needed." For me, this means that we should not

be afraid of spending too much time together, having too many potluck dinners, too many parties or going out to eat together too often, but always actively reaching out to our brothers and sisters on the periphery of the dance floor.

I came to know this church after five years in Birmingham, five years during which I have myself excluded other gay men and felt excluded myself. How many wasted nights sitting in silence in the darkness of by the walls of the local bars! I wish somebody had told me about this church before. We should go out and invite all gay people in Birmingham to come to a place where everybody participates in the dance, where nobody has to watch from the dark.

Mauricio Botero-Vélez.

Foust

continued from previous page

strength, and confirmation of our purpose.

Is it not shelter when we can sit with God as a community and know holy love? Is it not strength, when our bright voices rise in freedom songs against the clouded murmurs of the world? Do we not find purpose when we know deep

down we will teach the world true Christian love even though the world screams, kicks and will not suffer our touch.

Our young family tree grows in the winds of change and signals YES to all these questions.

John Foust

GOD is...



'Hang me up!'
September 1994

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 7p Bible Study	2 Pastor's Day Off	3
4 10a Sunday School 11a Worship 7p Worship	5	6 6p Choir	7 7p Special Study Course "Healing Grief"	8 7p Bible Study	9 Pastor's Day Off	10
11 10a Sunday School 11a Worship Deacon Installation 7p Worship	12 7p Board Meeting	13 6p Choir 7:30p Excel: Sharing with Friends	14 7p Special Study Course "Healing Grief"	15 7p Bible Study	16 7p Fun Night Pastor's Day Off	17
18 Second Offering* 10a Sunday School 11a Worship 7p Worship	19 7:30p BAO service (call for info)	20 6p Choir	21 5:30p Youth Meeting	22 7p Bible Study	23 Pastor's Day Off	24 9a Choir Workshop
25 Pastor Installation 10a Sunday School 11a Worship 7p Worship	26 6p Deacon/Staff Meeting	27 6p Choir	28	29 7p Bible Study	30 Pastor's Day Off	

Building Fund Goal

Every third Sunday, CMCC will take two offerings. One will be the regular offering and the other will be specifically for the Building Fund.

This will be a perfect opportunity to keep up your building pledges or drop in a few extra dollars toward this fund.

Our goal is \$50,000 for downpayment on a building. The Building Fund now stands at \$31,000.

BAO Food Drive

Covenant has had success with the new way of gathering items for the Birmingham AIDS Outreach Food Pantry.

Don't forget to bring your items for this month.

Sept. 4 Tuna Fish
Sept. 11 Beef Stew and Chicken & Dumplings
Sept. 18 Macaroni and Cheese, spaghetti, rice
Sept. 24 Carnation Instant Breakfast, Ensure, or the like.

Faster than you can say, 'Troy Perry'

Make your plans now to attend the Gulf Lower Atlantic District (GLAD) Conference in Wilmington, N.C., Nov. 11-13.

Featured speaker will be Rev. Elder Troy Perry, UFMCC founder. Marsha Stephens will be there, too.

Wilmington is a beautiful resort on the Atlantic coast. Call 1-800-662-9338 or 910-763-5900 and re-

serve under GLAD or MCC. Room rates are \$60 per night plus tax.

Map mileage to Wilmington is 566 miles via I-20 to Florence S.C. and U.S. 76 on to Wilmington. Estimated driving time is 10 hrs. 36 mins per the atlas.

Remember, November will be here faster than you can say, "Troy Perry."

Steve Parker

Potpourri

The Last Page

Bears for BAO

Every year it seems that Christmas comes earlier and earlier.

We can beat the shops and malls to the punch with our own yuletide cheer by buying a bear for BAO's Adrian Daniel's Memorial Holiday Gift Box Project..

BAO prepares more than 300 gift boxes that go

to people living with AIDS and children.

Other gifts can be donated instead of stuffed bears, such as colognes, personal care items and the like.

For more information on this project contact Judy Bridges at 322-4197.

More Help Wanted

Covenant has a variety of programs that need committed people at the helm. Read over the list of open positions. Pray. And then see Rev. Marge if you are interested in helping.

Familyship/Socials Director
(gift of hospitality needed)

Evangelism/Outreach Director
Sunday School teachers
(pre-school—3rd grade)
(4th—7th grade)
(adult: 30 and above, alternating Sundays)
Children's Church
(teens and adults needed)
Children's Choir Director

He balanced nature with the trees and the tiger
And he cursed man; never to be idle.

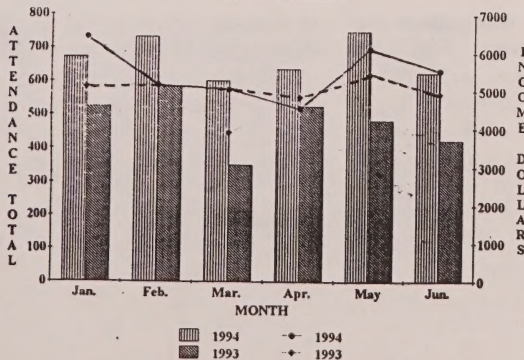
He made the earth complete with sonic boom
And it to rhyme with the planets in lunar tune
He is Lord, our God: Milky Way.

The sun was born with a blink of his eyes
He beat his chest and the thunders cried.
He smote his rod and divided the day from night
He stepped back and all was good and right.
He's the Lord, our God: Milky Way.

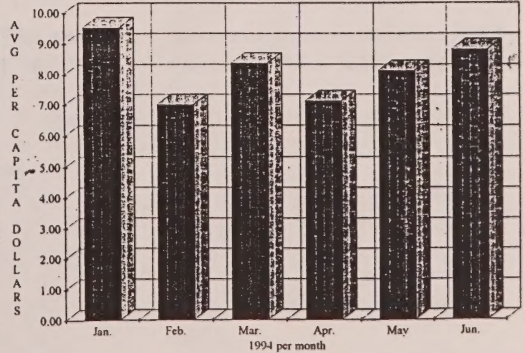
Let's take a break from our routine today
And see the Lord upon the Milky Way.
The trip will be intriguing and unique.
Unlike anything we have ever dreamed of...
In our sleep...In our sleep...In our sleep.

Timothy B.

MID-YEAR REPORT
Attendance/Finances



Average Giving
per attendee



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Covenant

T I M E S

October 1994

Passages

Rev. Marge Ragona installed as pastor

BY MARK B. MOORE

Red—the color filled the sanctuary. The altar was dressed in it. The choir wore red stoles.

And deacons Kay and Shirley adorned the Rev. Marge Ragona in a red chasuble and stole as she moved from one level to another at her installation as pastor of CMCC Sept. 25.

CMCC's deacons, board of directors, student clergy and lay delegate took part in a service with District Coordinator the Rev. Jay Neely where the tools of the church were presented to Rev. Ragona.

Equipped with these tools and with a calling to be God's servant, she was charged with the responsibility of being the priest and pastor of our community.

For this special day Rev. Neely, who is also an old friend of Rev. Ragona's, delivered the sermon to a full congregation. His topic highlighted the fact that we are all working to be more in Christ than we were before. The moment Christ enters someone's life does not make that person perfect, he said, but rather starts

a continuing change in that person that lasts a lifetime.

To add to the excitement of the day, church doors were opened to receive two new members at the end of the morning worship service.

This day was also pastor's appreciation day and Ragona, as well as, Student Clergy John Hankins were presented with gifts of appreciation following the evening service. Among their gifts were an engraved desk clock for Rev. Ragona and a plaque for Hankins.

Susan Walker answers call to music ministry

BY JOHN FOUST

Susan Walker's first rehearsal as choir director at Covenant began auspiciously Sept. 20. She walked in hugging a folder of music, stood before fourteen Covenant singers with a smile, and had them singing within five minutes.

Her approach is direct, open, and most of all loving. She quickly found in that diverse group of men and women someone to fill every section: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. Then she led the choir through "Let the Lord Bless You and Keep You" so that she could learn about the people she

was working with. "This hymn is a great one for blending," she said.

Within the hour the choir had rehearsed "Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above." It was chosen for Rev. Marge Ragona's installation. Susan recommended that each choir member take home a copy of the hymn so that they could explore the meaning of the words more deeply and thereby produce a hymn "that is living and speaks" to the congregation.

It was a marvelous event to witness Susan and the choir work together. I am always amazed at the

harmony a group can achieve when it knowingly works in the presence of God.

Susan's ability to direct the choir in a joyous but professional manner comes from her lifelong interest in music. She began singing in the choir and playing the piano at a very early age. She studied with good teachers in her youth. As she matured, her interest in music continued undiminished.

First she completed her bachelor's

*Marge's Musings***Let Go and Let God****"Cast all your cares on God, because God cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)**

Most of us have times when we are anxious and even frantic about where our lives have taken us. We become frightened and forget that God really loves us and wants us to be happy. Many of us serve a very angry God and cannot imagine why we literally fear God, when what the Bible intends is for us to be in awe of God. We do not understand that we can give our worries to God. We can trust God with our cares, because God cares for us.

This is one reason we have been doing our healing groups. We began with a group learning to change our "distorted images of God," and went on to help those dealing with issues concerning abuse, loss and grief, and now co-dependency. I don't really like the idea of this problem being labeled co-dependency, because all of us living are interdependent. We all must at times lean on each other and depend upon each other for comfort and sustenance. But some of us mistake interdependency for unhealthy caretaking and control, particularly when we love someone who is addicted or engaged in self-destructive behaviors. Co-dependency describes the behaviors we use to lessen our own fear, an-

ger and helplessness in the face of another's problem. Unfortunately, both the addicted person's behavior and the frenzied co-dependent behavior combine in a destructive downward cycle.

Many of us have a long history of over-responsibil-

lems. Many of us are unwilling to face the seriousness of the problem and the fact that it requires professional help. In denying that there is truly a problem many become isolated, angry, afraid, exhausted, and confused — but determined to try even harder to find a

eventually face our own emptiness. We wind up blaming others for our unhappiness and everyone is miserable. Healing this unhappiness requires that we let go of blame and learn to entrust the people we love to the care of God. We all know the expression

Healing this unhappiness requires that we let go of blame and learn to entrust the people we love to the care of God.

ity and caretaking. For many of us, it was how we were trained as women; for others it grew out of our own insecurity and lack of self-esteem. We chose needy partners because we didn't think enough of ourselves to feel we deserved healthy partners. We thought (and think) our only value in life is derived from what we do rather than who we are. As a result, we are driven to do too much for others — so much, in fact, that no time remains to focus on our own needs or to rest in God's unchanging love. Many of us are unwilling to face the fact that we cannot fix what is troubling others; it is beyond our capability and belongs entirely to the other person. They must want to get healthy and work on their own prob-

solution within themselves. Our healing comes when we can let go of denial and let God help us tell the truth, especially to ourselves.

Sometimes, co-dependency is rooted in the belief that other people make us happy. As a result, people reason first that happiness depends on having someone else in our lives, even if that person is not whole, and secondly that we can control the behavior of the people who are nearest us. We yell and lecture, accuse and blame, withhold love and affection, or work very, very hard to please the other person in the hope that we can earn love, or worse can earn the right to control the other. The problem is that it is not possible to control anyone else and we must

"Let go and let God," but for people trapped in co-dependency that is very difficult to do. If we are not in control, if we are not responsible, we believe that everything will become chaotic and everything will fall apart. We hang on for dear life, and suffocate the very life out of our relationships.

We must let go! Letting go means facing painful truths and grieving painful losses. Letting go of blame means experiencing loss of power. Letting go and letting God is a frightening and risky adventure, but that letting go can mean shalom — wholeness and peace. We can let go of our cares. We can turn them over to God. We must believe that God cares for us

See *Marge*, page 4

Members Appreciated and Honored

Emmett W., Covenant's Vice Moderator of the Board of Directors, received a plaque for his leadership during Rev. Cliff Morrison's final illness and the interval between then and calling a new pastor. Emmett quietly saw to Covenant's needs and met them. Additionally, it was during this time that the church moved and began worshipping at a new location, and Emmett was one of the people who undertook the leadership role during that move. Cov-

enant thanks Emmett for his work as Vice Moderator and for all the leadership he provided during that interim period.

Gene A., who is one of the quiet unsung people in the background (and wishing to remain there), is always on hand when there is work to be done and who supports the programs of the church with his efforts and love always. Gene received a certificate of appreciation as an unsung hero. Others receiving certificates were Mark C. for

his leadership of the choir; Allan F. for his coordination of the move and for many, many times when he acts as coordinator of projects for the church; Mark Moore for the new look and excellent editing of the church newsletter, and Steve P. for leading the care team and coordinating care services for Cliff during his last illness.

Very often people do special things and we forget to say thank you. This is the church's way of thanking people who do things

above and beyond what they are called to do and who make Covenant the very special church it is. In addition to these people, we want to thank many, many people for doing more than their share in many ways. You may not think you are being recognized, but many know who you are. Just think, next year, you may be the one we remember as worthy of special recognition! Again, thanks to all our members for being special.

M. Ragona

Walker

continued from page 1

degree in music education at Samford University in Birmingham. She continued her music studies, and was awarded a master's degree in church music from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

Susan's degrees point to her interest in music education. But her course work also included such areas as theology and church history. This background produced the kind of ministry I saw at her first choir rehearsal at Covenant.

A few days after the rehearsal, I talked with Susan and asked her how she felt the rehearsal went. She discovered first hand that "the

choir is an unusually talented group" and has an excellent base upon which it can build to better carry out its purpose. That purpose is to "lead the congregation into more meaningful worship."

She hastened to add that the purpose of the choir involves much more than performance. She sees the choir as a team of friends that worship together, learn how to get along with each other, and finally gain spiritual maturity.

We all know that the choir enhances our worship at Covenant.

Music has always been important to us. But I

pressed Susan for particulars.

"There are several ways the choir can enhance worship," Susan said. The choir can participate in the service as the leader of congregational singing, it can sing prayer responses during the service, it can sing during the offertory, during communion, and at the benediction.

In other words, the choir is a key part in the liturgy of the worship service. Susan sees liturgy as an acting out or dramatizing of Christ's life for a year. She emphasizes that liturgy is "emotional and sensuous" and that it draws us nearer

to God. For instance, when the choir sing alleluias on Easter morning, we know for certain that Christ has risen because we feel it in the air. Christ risen becomes tangible through songs of joy.

Susan knows that others in the church share her view that the ministry of music is a high calling. She and the choir invite all who wish to come and share this ministry. The power of music is so strong, and is especially strong when the diversity of our church is united to proclaim the good news to the world.

CMCC to Take Steps For All Walks of Life

Covenant MCC is involved in a big way in this year's Alabama AIDS Walk. The church intends to involve more than 300 walkers in the event.

Church organizers distributed kits to many attend-

ing Sunday services Sept 25. Each kit enables an individual to sign up walkers and receive contributions that will go for education, care, and services required in the fight against AIDS.

If you want to sign up

as a walker or if you would like to organize a group of walkers, or if you wish to know more about how you can raise money for this worthy cause, contact Dottie Cook or Wes Fortner. They are co-chair-

ing the organization at CMCC.

AIDS Walk events will begin at the UAB Mini-park at noon Sunday, Oct. 23. The walk starts after the opening ceremonies beginning at 3 p.m.

Perspectives We Can Testify

There is some truth in the old saying, that everyone has a story to tell. I believe this is especially true of the Christians at Covenant MCC.

One of the old ministries is to tell your story. It is important to tell your story so that others can learn from you and follow you, and gain strength through you.

How can you testify? In the early church you stood before your sisters and brothers and spoke. You may not have known what you were going to say, but God took hold and your words rang true to all who heard.

Testifying at Covenant is not so different from the old days. You can still testify before your brothers and sisters. But there are other ways ... ways just as old and true as "stand and

testify."

I invite you to come and talk to me about testifying through song and written word. I propose that this church perform, collect, and publish its own hymns, songs, poems, and essays. We could leave a legacy to our gay brothers and lesbian sisters of the future. They should know our joys, fears, struggles and hopes so that they can find their way as well.

Hymns about freedom, songs about struggle, poems about courage, essays about truth are just a few of the experiences that every one in this church has had. Be brave. Call me or write to me. Let us work together to spread the good news to others who need it today and tomorrow.

John Foust

IF THE 'SHOE' FITS

Opportunities for service

Have you been looking for a place to fit in and make a positive contribution to your church. Here is a place where there is a need and where you might find community.

If after prayer and consideration you feel a call to help with this committee, please talk to Greg Adams.

SHOE Committee

The director of this committee will be responsible for Socials, Hospitality, Outreach and Evangelism.

Marge

continued from page 2

and that God is able when we are not.

I include myself in the above. Probably every pastor, teacher, nurse, physician, counselor, social worker, deacon — every person in our church who cares about others, and that is all of us — sometimes goes overboard and tries too hard to change the people we care about and feels guilty and anxious because we can't. God can; that's what redemption is all about. We can pray for it, but we can't make it happen.

That's the work of the Holy Spirit, working in the person we love.

Our latest study in healing deals with healing our own co-dependency. I invite all of you who recognized yourself in the above to come out for six Wednesdays beginning Oct. 5 for our newest healing group. Healing begins with ourselves. Come and begin the process with others who are learning to "let go and let God" and accept the fact that God really cares for us.

Rev. Marge Ragona

Deacon's Diary Ministry of Believers

We all have responsibilities, especially as gay Christians to minister to those who have been told they are not worthy of the Kingdom of God." Talk about a "tell-you-gram" from God, living up to the words of your own sermon can be quite a responsibility.

Greetings to all my brothers and sisters in Christ, at CMCC. My name is Mark, and I am a deacon candidate. I have journeyed to CMCC after 35 years of wandering in the wilderness of "right", "wrong" and a lot of "yes, but". I come from a very diverse religious background which includes Methodist, Baptist, and

Catholic. I know a lot about guilt! Mostly the type of self-imposed and self-inflicted guilt I was taught as a child. *Thank God for CMCC.* I first learned of CMCC in 1992 when I joined, Sexual Acceptance For Everyone (SAFE), a student group at the University of Montevallo. At the time, the group's leader was my friend and brother, Mark B. Moore. Mark invited me to come to church with him. I had heard of a church in Birmingham where gays were welcomed, but had not been able to find anyone to help find the church.

The first time I walked through the doors of

CMCC I knew God had led me home. I had struggled for several years spiritually, with God, drugs, alcohol, being gay, etc. I was greeted at the door with warm hugs and smiles and most of all there was no feeling of guilt. I feel this is where I belong, and have been spiritually led. Recently, I have had a life-long dream come true. That dream was to someday preach a sermon. Now that dream has come true and I look forward to one day serving God and my brothers and sisters at CMCC as a Deacon. In Christ, we are all ministers to each other. Peace be with you.

Mark Brown

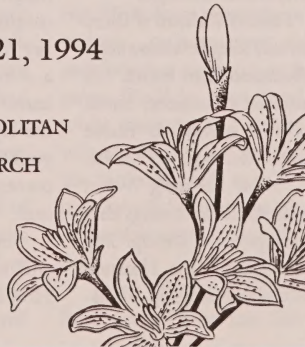
KAY HENDRIX & SHIRLEY COOPER

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7:30 p.m., October 21, 1994

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Covenant TIMES

published by
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11 a.m. and 7 p.m.
Sunday School classes
10 a.m.

CMCC Staff
Rev. Marge Ragona,
Pastor
John Hankins, Student Clergy
Deacons
Cal, Shirley, Kay, Cliff

Newsletter Staff
John Foust, co-editor
Mark B. Moore, art director
Timothy B.
Mark Brown

EDITOR'S NOTE Submissions?

Anyone interested in submitting to the newsletter should approach John Foust or myself. We accept a variety of writings and also assign articles as needed.

If possible, please turn in your submission on diskette (5 1/4" or 3 1/2") formatted for IBM, and saved as an ASCII file.

The deadline for this month is Oct. 16. You can submit a piece to John Foust or me.

We also need help with various aspects of production from typing to proofing to folding.

Questions? Call 823-9320.

—Mark B. Moore

*Perspectives***A Song in His Heart**

Randall Foster always has a song in his heart. I could see that plainly as he sat across from me a few days ago. He was talking about music; he was glowing. Shyness had fled from him.

Randall comes from Warrior. He remembers it fondly as an idyllic place where he grew up in the gently rolling hills filled with farms and quiet days. It was the kind of place that nurtured his gentle spirit.

Warrior and the countryside surrounding it are dotted with white plank churches with such names as Mt. Zion and Clear Springs where for generations farm folk have raised up their voices to God and filled the fields with joy. Randall told me that he used to go with his grandmother to her church and how she would urge him to sing. Heartfelt song was a central part of worship in his grandmother's church and she frequently sang.

Randall never sang for his grandmother, but through her singing she nevertheless put in his heart a seed that in later years would sprout and grow. Randall could not have known then what God's plan was. Little did he know that he would overcome his shyness, move to

the city, and stand before Christians and sing.

Randall met Cliff Morrison at Covenant MCC. And it was at Cliff's urging that Randall sang for the first time. He sang "Precious Lord Take My Hand." It was an appropriate choice for the first big step into his special music ministry. He told me he was filled with conflicting emotions. Although he wanted to sing, he felt scared.

In a tape of this first time he sang, you can hear his voice tremble at the beginning. But as the song continues, you can hear the confidence and sincerity of his voice grow. God, indeed, did take his hand. What a brave step to take!

Randall describes his voice as a solid, natural baritone. Many in MCC have heard Randall sing and know that his voice is much more than that. When he sings, his honesty and sincerity come through.

I asked Randall if there was any singer whose style influenced him most. He hesitated a moment; those dark eyes sparkled. "I have to say it was Squire Parsons. You know his song 'Sweet Bulah Land?' He sings that so simply and strong. His songs speak to me. I learned a lot about singing by lis-

tening to him."

I wondered what it was that make singers like Randall sing so honestly and from the heart. So I asked, "What advice would you give others who want to sing?"

There was no hesitation this time. He quickly counted off four things that he felt to be the most important aspects of singing. It was as if he had rehearsed these in his mind before I had asked the question.

"Work hard," he told me. Work hard is fine, I told myself. It means that you have an urgency about what you are doing. That you are willing to spend a great deal of time and energy to learn all you can about singing.

"Pray a lot," he added. I know that Randall must pray a lot. Like the first time he sang, he has God's help each time he sings. He must pray to understand the words he sings.

"Sing songs that have a meaning for you." This means that God must convey to you the meaning of a song. And when you know the meaning and feel the urgency to convey it to your brothers and sisters, it comes out strong and sincere.

"Sing songs you know will touch other people." How can Randall not touch

other people, I thought, when he is an instrument of God.

I asked Randall if he had to choose one song as his favorite from all the songs he knows, what would that song be? "Sweet Beulah Land," he answered. "It's my favorite because it is a song about heaven. It moves me no matter how often I sing it."

I wondered why songs about heaven attract Randall. I wondered if I should ask him why. I gathered up my courage and asked him. He answered simply: "Every day I feel closer to home. My grandmother wanted to go to heaven and I want to go there too."

How could I respond? His honesty overwhelmed me just as it does when he sings. The circle truly does go unbroken, I thought. I had no more questions to ask. I simply laid down my notes, turned up the Emmy Lou Harris gospel music playing softly on the CD player, and sank back into a sea of joy knowing God and Randall were with me in the room.

John Foust

*Perspectives***The Voice in the Wilderness**

In my warm room I began to read Psalm 107 and found these passages near the beginning:

Some had lost their way in a barren desert; found no path toward a city to live in.

They were hungry and thirsty;

Their life was ebbing away.

The psalmist saw the desert as a wilderness that is without water or food. Trying to make the concept of wilderness meaningful, I envisioned the city in which we live as a wilderness. We might not hunger and thirst in a physical way, but we certainly hunger and thirst for love and comfort and cry out to the Lord for rescue. We might not be cold in our warm, safe rooms, but we certainly know that the desert demons are howling outside.

Here in Birmingham the nights are becoming cooler. The tree tops at my windows rustle in the wind, swell full of breath, wait for the rains ... the rains that will strip them to their essential forms. They are in the wilderness; their soft voices are God speaking.

When I listen, God speaks to me at the window. Am I so unique that only I can hear? No, I think not. Surely each member of our Covenant community lis-

tens to God, although some listen more closely than others.

We all hear God speaking to some degree. Some hear in the quiet of the rooms and in the voice of strangers, but all hear God when in our diversity we sit in community and sing. Is it not a wonder how time after time our rough, diverse voices form a whole and pray powerfully to God? When we praise and lift our hearts together, all the worldly pains and joys that each of us contain are stripped away like leaves from a tree. Our souls are naked, open, essential before the One We Love, and nothing else matters.

Have you noticed how we linger in the sanctuary when the songs are over? The warm sea of God's love still lingers where we bathe and heal. Time seems to stand still for awhile. We leave knowing that beyond the doors is the wilderness in which dark voices lurk and intrude on our tranquility. But we go bravely out because we are washed clean, fortified, and have come to terms with ourselves.

Our wilderness is full of dark voices. They are always with us. Some speak in dark alleyways; some bark in our own front yards; some yell

obscenities from a distance. Let me introduce the voices I battle most by name. Some of you may know them already. They are Fear, Loneliness, Obsession, False Pride and Rumor. They have many children.

You remember Fear, the old one from childhood. He still sleeps under beds and in closets. He likes the dark so that he cannot be seen. At night he fawns over you while you sleep. He tells you that God hates you. He convinces you that you are dirty and could not possibly be a creation of God. Isolation is his game.

Loneliness smiles at you. She hovers at the base of the barstool or your kitchen chair. She whimpers and whines searching for scraps of kindness. She tells you that you cannot find human love, much less the love of God. She tells you that if she cannot have you, she will die.

Obsession sniffs you out. He follows everywhere you go ... to restaurants, to park benches and to church pews. He licks your hand while you eat and winks when you reach out to feed the birds. He tells you human love is hunger and appetite that cannot be satisfied.

False Pride sits in the front seat of your car. She

snarls as you drive her gleaming down the streets. Her hair shines, her teeth are perfect and white, she smells of powders and perfume, and speaks several languages. She whispers, puffs you up, makes you think arrogance is everything, convinces you that you do not need love at all.

And last, do not forget Rumor. He is the howl heard at a distance. He is the cackle cut short when you walk into a room. He is the story of hurt. He is witty and has a sharp tongue. His simpering drowns out truth and love.

These dark voices and many more like them fill our days in Birmingham. You should know them for what they are and be vigilant. In times of weakness when we lose focus and turn from God, we allow these voices to grow in strength. What a din they make then! All their snarling and bickering distract us from correct action. But when we listen to the voice of God which we carry with us always, the dark voices diminish and finally fade away.

Finally let me say, listen for God's voice in everything you do. When you hear fear, when you scream

See **The Voice**, page 9

'Hang me up!'
October 1994

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 10a Budget & Calendar Planning Workshop
2 10a Sunday School 11a Worship 7p Worship	3 7p Inquirer's 'Faith'	4 7p Choir	5 7p Study Series 'Healing Codependency'	6 7p Bible Study	7 Pastor's Day Off	8
9 10a Sunday School 11a Worship FOUNDERS DAY* 7p Worship	10 7p Inquirer's 'Polity' 7p Board Meeting	11 7p Choir 7:30p Gay Parent's Group NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY	12 7p Study Series 'Healing Codependency'	13 7p Bible Study	14 Pastor's Day Off	15
16 Second Offering* 10a Sunday School 11a Worship 7p Worship Newsletter deadline	17 7p Inquirer's 'Homosexuality' 7:30p BAO service (call for info)	18 7p Choir	19 5:30p Youth Meeting 7p Study Series 'Healing Codependency'	20 7p Bible Study	21 Pastor's Day Off Holy Union*	22
23 10a Sunday School 11a Worship 1p AIDS Walk 7p Worship	24 6p Deacon/Staff Meeting	25 7p Choir 7:30p Deacon Training 7p Newsletter production	26 7p Study Series 'Healing Codependency'	27 7p Bible Study	28 Pastor's Day Off	29 5:30p Youth Carnival & Social 6p Trip to the Opera
30 10a Sunday School 11a Worship 7p Worship	31 Halloween					

NEWS, NOTES ETC.

District Conference

Make your plans now to attend the Gulf Lower Atlantic District (GLAD)

Conference in Wilmington, N.C., Nov. 11-13.

Featured guests will be Rev. Elder Troy Perry, UFMCC founder, and Marsha Stephens, composer of the popular hymn, *For Those Tears I Died*.

Call 1-800-662-9338 or 910-763-5900 and reserve

under GLAD or MCC. Room rates are \$60 per night plus tax.

Map mileage to Wilmington is 566 miles via I-20 to Florence S.C. and U.S. 76 on to Wilmington. Estimated driving time is between 10 and 11 hours.

Halloween Fun

There is something planned for everyone at CMCC for Halloween.

Beginning at 5:30 p.m. Oct. 29 will be a carnival and social for our kids and teenagers. And at 6 p.m. adults can make a trip to see *Phantom of the Opera*.

Potpourri

The Last Page

Thanks...

I would like to say thank you to everyone who supported me with love, cards, hugs, and even jokes after my car accident. Thanks to all of you who helped to change the tire at Denny's. And I am eternally grateful to Rick and Lynn for the use of their truck.

Michael T. Betts

Special thanks to everyone for prayers and support during my surgery. A special thank you for your love and caring for me, Marge and my mother.

Shirley Lambert

Special Sundays

This month music will play an extra special role in the worship services. For Founders Day, Oct. 9, selected music will be pieces written for the Fellowship or by its members. And at month's end, Oct. 31, African-American music will be featured.

Our Helping Hands

Don't forget to bring your Birmingham AIDS Outreach food pantry items.

OCT. 2—Tuna Fish

OCT. 9—Beef Stew and Chicken & Dumplings

OCT. 16—Macaroni and Cheese, spaghetti, rice

OCT. 23—Carnation Instant Breakfast, Ensure, or the like.

Bears for BAO

Every year it seems that Christmas comes earlier and earlier.

We can beat the shops and malls to the punch with our own yuletide cheer by buying a bear for BAO's Adrian Daniel's Memorial Holiday Gift Box Project.

BAO prepares more than 300 gift boxes that go to people living with AIDS and children.

Other gifts such as colognes, personal care items and the like can also be donated.

For more information on this project contact Judy Bridges at 322-4197.

Building Fund Goal

Every third Sunday, CMCC will take two offerings. One will be the regular offering and the other will be specifically for the Building Fund.

Our goal is \$50,000 for downpayment on a building. The Building Fund now stands at \$31,000.

Sonnet #1

Ailments heal by your apothecary,
Eternal one of cumulus and roses
Before your millennium evil closes.
There's the trump and scent of bayberry.
White robes and thanksgiving never tarry.
The righteous conquer as evil doses;
Spirits of the lamb and the song of Moses.
More death than any mortician can bury.

The lost daisies will cease to roam.
The lion and the lamb will be at home.

Sinners dived into their death.
Deity shared its crown and wealth.

Thorns falling by the way.
Rejoice ye roses: judgement day.

Timothy B.

The Voice

continued from page 7

despair, know that God is with you and hears your scream.

When you are feeling lonely and sorry for yourself, go out in the world. Listen for God speaking in all those you meet.

When you are obsessed with the hunt for sex and security, dig down deep inside yourself and let God talk to you softly as only a true lover can.

When you collect beautiful things about you, know that God is not attracted by their glamour but finds you beautiful and

loves you unadorned.

And finally, when rumors fly, pull back a little and acknowledge within yourself that you have failings and weaknesses yourself. Listen to God's quiet question: "Do you not know that I am with you always."

Learn to listen to God's voice in all places. When you leave the warmth of the church or the safe walls of your home, go bravely and confidently into the wilderness for God's voice is with you everywhere.

John Foust

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Covenant

T I M E S

NOVEMBER 1994

David among the Goliaths

CMCC
raises
\$2,710
for
AIDS
Walk

Covenant Metropolitan Community Church took on corporate America in the Alabama AIDS Walk, and proved once again that when a group of dedicated Christians, gay and straight, decide to do the right thing, amazing things happen. Special thanks are due Wes and Dottie for leading us to excellence. Barry Norris, Birmingham AIDS Outreach treasurer reported BellSouth had 133 walkers and raised the largest amount of funds, University of Alabama at Birmingham AIDS Center had 86 walkers and was second in fundraising, Blue Cross had 39 walkers and was third in fundraising, St. Vincent's Medical Center had 25 walkers and was fifth in fundraising, Baptist



Medical Center had 24 walkers and was sixth in fundraising. Where was little CMCC? Fourth in fundraising, sixth in the number of walkers with 22! Not half bad, and this was our first concerted effort as a group to raise money for the AIDS Walk! CMCC has every reason to be proud. We were way ahead of any of the churches involved. Although some had larger groups present at the Walk, not as many of their walkers were fundraisers, which is how the number of "walkers" are computed. At the walk, over 65 CMCC members were present, some walking with their employment groups. Well done, thou good and faithful servants!

Advent: Symbolizing three comings

The
season
will
soon
be
upon
us

It's too early to think about Christmas! Yes, it is. But the department stores have had Christmas decorations up since before Halloween, and we are being told to lay away, set aside, buy, get ready to give. Is that what it's all about? Not a bit. A wonderful way to prepare ourselves for Christmas is in the keeping of Advent. Advent, of course, means "the coming," and it symbolizes three comings: first, the original coming of the infant Jesus to Mary at Bethlehem; secondly, the coming of Jesus to each of us in rebirth, either for the first time, or renewed birth in a deeper sense of reality; and, thirdly, the unpredictable coming of Jesus in glory at the Parousia (the end of this known age).

Advent begins on the Sunday nearest November 30th, and originated in France in the fourth century. In the sixth century, the season was set at four weeks. In those times Advent was strictly observed; people were asked to attend church and fast daily.

Since Advent promises the sure coming of Christ, the message is "prepare." Ready or not, Jesus is coming. Advent suggests that we prepare in three ways: (1) Repentance — being sorry for things we have done that are not pleasing to God, and making our lives reveal our love for

God; (2) Prayer for the coming of Christ who will save the world; and (3) Patience, for the coming may be delayed. Watch and wait, for the coming may be sudden.

Advent's mood is expressed in color. The color is royal blue for the coming of Christ as ruler of all. Blue also is the color of hope, and the four Sundays of Advent celebrate hope, joy, peace and love. Advent, like Lent, is a time to take personal inventory. How close am I to the coming of Christ in glory? What do I need to do to get ready? Traditionally, weddings are discouraged in Advent and choirs omit processions. It is not a time to sing the traditional Christmas carols, but there are special Advent hymns, like "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." The mood is a quiet joy of anticipation, a joy of hope amid solemnity.

We celebrate by the service of "hanging of the greens" on the first Sunday of Advent, and by putting wreaths in our churches and homes. Children often keep an Advent calendar, which counts the days before Christmas with Bible stories and games. We light the four blue candles, one on each Sunday of Advent, and finally the Christ candle on Christ-

Please see **Advent** on page 3

Marge's Musings

Stress-free Tithing

"As you go, proclaim the good news...Freely you have received, freely give." (Matthew 10:7-8)

This is the first time since I have been pastor at Covenant to discuss my ideas of church financing with you. CMCC is not just any church. We are a church about healing the long term devastation in our community that oppression has worked. A lot of people in our community are hurting, angry, and self-destructive. In MCC, we have heard the good news. It was given to us freely, but someone already there was paying the cost for us. Each of us, in turn, needs to pick up the cost of healing the next person in line. More importantly, each of us needs to do God's work in changing society so that others will not have to go through this healing process. The MCC By-Laws tell us that we "are the people of God, called by God, and authorized by Scripture to respond to the Word, serving as Christ served, to the end that the church may be edified (built up) and the world transformed." If we are going to transform the world, that will take money, effort, service, commitment, and all of us working together. Change does not come easily or cheaply.

Hear the New Message

When any MCC asks you to pledge a portion of your income for God's work in healing our community, don't hear the old irritating messages. This isn't the old church, where we learned to tithe and were taught to feel guilty if we didn't, learned we had to pay something back to God (we don't, grace is free), were put in competitive situations and tithed because it affected what others thought of us. Even worse, we were taught

to tithe out of a desire to control those who receive what we give. Nobody at Covenant is insisting that you tithe, or having someone you love or look up to pressure you. And I hope nobody is telling you that you are going to get because you give. (You may not, and then you will feel angry with God or, worse, feel that God does not love you.) More importantly, this is not concerned with your share of the budget. What matters is God's share of our incomes.

Reasons to Tithe

There are good reasons to tithe. We can give as a response to God's grace. How many of us were hurting, angry and needed the knowledge that God loved us. The message that we, too, are covered by the grace of God in Jesus is the primary message being preached in MCCs all over the world, and we have heard and believe. We can give in response to the example of Jesus, who gave himself for us. We can give because others need to hear the positive message that it is okay to be gay and Christian. We can give as an expression of thanksgiving to God. We can give as a way of symbolizing our commitment of all our resources to the service of God and others. We can give because we love God and want to show that love.

Tithing Scares Some

MCC teaches the tithe as a fair share of our incomes. That scares a lot of us. We really don't trust God to meet our needs. We think of 10% as a large percentage, and forget that we still have 90% that can go a long way. What I dis-

covered was that once I began to give 10%, the rest went further. I can't explain it, but I have fewer debts now than I have ever had in my life. I live well and comfortably. Shirley and I drive a nice, reasonably new car. I can eat anywhere I want to for whatever price I choose to pay, and I buy clothing that suits my lifestyle. I own all the toys (like our computer) that I want and need. I'm not hurting. I can give monetary gifts to my children for their needs, and treat my grandchildren to special gifts out of my heart. I don't feel deprived of anything I really want or need.

How to Start

My training pastor taught me proportional giving. We all start somewhere. What did I give last year? What proportion of my income was that? Was it 3%? This year I will give four. Was it only 1%; this year I will try to give two. Did I tithe (give a tenth) last year; this year I will give an over and above gift to support some special work of the church. Some portion of my income, identified as a definite percentage, will be given to help God work in our community. (See the chart elsewhere on page 5.) I will put hands and feet to God's work in a way that I can identify. That's what the tithe is! It started in Old Testament times as a way of the community supporting a synagogue. It took ten families to make a minyan — the number of families that could support a rabbi. Each family gave a tenth of its income, and in that way the rabbi could live at the same level the others in the community did. It

was a fair way to support God's person in the community. Eventually, it became the way the church was supported. Paul told the churches he founded to put a proportion of their goods aside each week and bring them to the assembly, so that there would be plenty for all, and some to share with poorer congregations — like Jerusalem, which had an abundance of the poor.

Where Tithing Goes

At Covenant, our income goes to support benevolences we believe in, like AIDS work. We contribute through the District and Fellowship to new works and indigenous churches in Africa, Asia, Central and South America (places where people do not have the expendable incomes we have in North America) — what other churches would call home and foreign missions. We support our denomination through the tithe of what we take in, and 5% to the District; the same idea of proportional giving that we are recommending to church members from their personal incomes. Underlying it all is the idea that Jesus gave all for us; how can we give less than our all? With this newsletter you will receive a packet from the church, asking you to set aside a definite percentage of your income and give us that figure (not what percent it is), so that we can plan a budget. If we receive our base budget, we will fund the basic items. If we receive more, we can fund more items; and if we receive all we need, we will fund the whole budget.

See **God** on page 3

Deacon's Diary

Lots of Jobs

As a church we often forget that it takes "lots of jobs" to make the church services possible. Its not just the pastor, the deacons, and the altar guild. Its not just planning the sermon topic, the writing of the sermon, and the organization of the order of worship. A complete and meaningful service requires the participation of many. There are many jobs for many people. It reminds me of a kind of parable titled "Let George Do It" from a book called *Illustrations Unlimited* edited by James Hewett.

The story goes like this:

My eight-year-old son told me a joke one morning while I was frying eggs for breakfast. "Dad, how can you eat an egg without cracking the shell?"

I thought about it for several moments before finally conceding that I did not know.

He replied, "Get someone else to crack it for you."

Now this reminded me of some church people. They want the benefits the church has to offer without sharing the responsibilities. They want revival as long as someone else does the praying. They want good programs as long as someone else does the work.

If you want to eat eggs, you're going to have to break some shells.

Now you're all saying what's up the deacon's sleeve? Well, to answer that: lots of simple, easy, but very important jobs... that's what.

Here are a few examples:

- greet people
 - hand out programs
 - set up altar table
 - sing in the choir
 - help with Sunday School
 - help with Bible Study
 - help fold and address newsletters
 - help fold Sunday programs
 - pick up programs after service
 - help with children's church
 - join the familyship committee
- Just tell someone what you'd like to do. I'm sure you have some better ideas of how you might serve. Tell us about them. Many hands make God's work easier for each of us.

*Your loving deacon,
Cal*

Advent

continued from page 1

mas Eve. We sing special hymns and prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. Advent is a beautiful season, with a rich and deep heritage. For many of us from evangelical tradition, we are not accustomed to the keeping of Advent, but there is much we can learn of our Christian heritage during this season. We will learn

that Christ came as culmination of a historical process foretold by the prophets in the expectation of the Messiah. We learn how the "word became flesh" in the holy child. We also teach the second coming during Advent, and ask our congregations to make a new commitment to Christ, in a new coming of God into their hearts.

The word for Advent is "Watch and pray." Prepare your hearts for the coming of the infant Christ, the renewal of Christ in your heart, and the expectation of the second coming. Enjoy Advent as a true preparation for Christmas. It's better for your soul than shopping!

Rev. Marge Ragona

God Moving With Us

continued from previous page

Our church is God moving in our community, we must be the ones who make that possible. Plan to tithe. If that is not possible, look at what percentage of your income you can give, and plan to give that. Fill out your pledge card with a definite amount and maintain that week by week or month by month. I truly guarantee that you will not

suffer. Somehow God works with the remaining 90% and it is abundant. Have faith. Seek God's will for your life. Above all, do not tithe because it is a rule — tithe because it's a blessing.

A fellow pastor and I were talking, and we have both been blessed by tithing, and she said, "Don't you wish you could guarantee them the blessings you have

had. I would like to promise them I'd return every penny they gave if they didn't find it a blessing to tithe for just three months and see the difference." I know the difference. God has been enormously good to me, but that's what I will tell you in my sermon on pledge Sunday. Be there and let me share my blessing with you.

Rev. Marge Ragona

Covenant
TIMES

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Community Church

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P.O. Box 101473
Birmingham, AL 35210
599-3363

Worship Service

11 a.m. and 7 p.m.

Sunday School

10 a.m.

Pastor

Rev. Marge Ragona

Student Clergy

John Hankins,
Andy Mullins,
Greg Bullard (Huntsville)

Deacons

Cal, Shirley, Kay, Cliff

Newsletter Staff

John Foust
Co-Editor
Mark B. Moore
Art Director

Submissions to the Covenant Times newsletter are welcomed and encouraged. If possible submit work on 3 1/2 " diskette in either Macintosh or IBM, DOS, Windows format.

November 1994

C A L E N D A R O F E V E N T S

1 Tuesday

Choir Practice
7 p.m.
Council of Ministries Meeting
8 p.m.

3 Thursday

Bible Study
7 p.m.

4 Friday

Choir Practice
7 p.m.
■ Special practice for Christmas music. Come be a part. Call for directions.

5 Saturday

Grounds Spruce Up Day
10 a.m.

6 Sunday

Worship
11 a.m.
Worship
7 p.m.

8 Tuesday

Choir Practice
7 p.m.

10 Thursday

Bible Study
7 p.m.

11 Friday

District Conference
All weekend
■ Many from our church will be in Wilmington, N.C. for the Gulf Lower Atlantic District Conference. Keep them in your prayers for safe travel and blessings from the weekend's activities.

13 Sunday

Worship
11 a.m.
Worship
7 p.m.

14 Monday

Building Committee Meeting
6 p.m.
Board Meeting
7 p.m.

15 Tuesday

Choir Practice
7 p.m.

17 Thursday

Bible Study
7 p.m.

19 Saturday

Inquirer's Class
10 a.m.-noon, 1-3 p.m.
■ Classes to learn more about MCC, including a section on Homosexuality and the Bible. Will break for lunch.

20 Sunday

■ **Pledge Sunday Worship**
11 a.m.
Thanksgiving Dinner
1 p.m.
■ Join us for familyship and a potluck dinner.
Tuscaloosa Service
3 p.m.
■ A parish extension of CMCC will hold its first service in Tuscaloosa at the Holiday Inn. If you have a friend in the Tuscaloosa area let them know we'll be in town.

Worship
7 p.m.

21 Monday

BAO Service
7:30 p.m.

22 Tuesday

Choir Practice
7 p.m.

23 Wednesday

Thanksgiving Service
7 p.m.

24 Thursday

■ **Thanksgiving Day Bible Study**
7 p.m.

27 Sunday

■ **Advent Begins Worship**
11 a.m.
■ The season of Advent begins. Join us for the Hanging of the Greens.

Christmas Tree Memorial Service
4:30 p.m.
Worship
7 p.m.

28 Monday

Deacon/Staff Meeting
7:30 p.m.

29 Tuesday

Choir Practice
7 p.m.

Effective Dec. 4
Sunday School classes will begin meeting at 9:30 a.m.

Notice the Quilt
In the back of the sanctuary is a quilt made by women from the Dominican Republic MCC and Atlanta's Ray Barreras. We as a district are raffling the quilt which will remain on display until mid November. Raffle tickets are \$2/per ticket, \$5 / for three. Money raised will go toward scholarships for EXCEL spiritual retreats.

Thanks
Kay and Shirley want to thank everyone who shared in the renewed vows of their Holy Union.

WEEKLY PERCENTAGE GIVING GUIDE

Annual Income	Weekly Income	Weekly Giving if Percentage is:					
		2.5%	5%	7.5%	10%	12.5%	15%
\$5,200	\$100	2.50	5.00	7.50	10.00	12.50	15.00
6,500	125	3.13	6.25	9.38	12.50	15.63	18.75
7,800	150	3.75	7.50	11.25	15.00	18.75	22.50
9,100	175	4.38	8.75	13.13	17.50	21.88	26.25
10,400	200	5.00	10.00	15.00	20.00	25.00	30.00
11,700	225	5.63	11.25	16.88	22.50	28.10	33.75
13,000	250	6.25	12.50	18.75	25.00	31.25	37.50
14,300	275	6.88	13.75	20.63	27.50	34.38	41.25
15,600	300	7.50	15.00	22.50	30.00	37.50	45.00
16,900	325	8.13	16.25	24.38	32.50	40.63	48.75
18,200	350	8.75	17.50	26.25	35.00	43.75	52.50
19,500	375	9.38	18.75	28.13	37.50	46.88	56.25
20,800	400	10.00	20.00	30.00	40.00	50.00	60.00
26,000	500	12.50	25.00	37.50	50.00	62.50	75.00
31,200	600	15.00	30.00	45.00	60.00	75.00	90.00
36,400	700	17.50	35.00	52.50	70.00	87.50	105.00
41,600	800	20.00	40.00	60.00	80.00	100.00	120.00
46,800	900	22.50	45.00	67.50	90.00	112.50	135.00
52,000	1,000	25.00	50.00	75.00	100.00	125.00	150.00
62,500	1,200	30.00	60.00	90.00	120.00	150.00	180.00
72,800	1,400	35.00	70.00	105.00	140.00	175.00	210.00
83,200	1,600	40.00	80.00	120.00	160.00	200.00	240.00
93,000	1,800	45.00	90.00	135.00	180.00	225.00	270.00
104,000	2,000	50.00	100.00	150.00	200.00	250.00	300.00

To determine yearly giving multiply weekly giving by 52

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Why a Budget?

Over the years, Covenant MCC launched several projects on faith that resources will come if we as a church are doing God's footwork. And we have been blessed in many ways.

Some of the events were easy to see or hear about and a few are more subtle or less apparent. The most visible was the recent ef-

fort to raise building fund capital, and we do now have a nice growing account for that future facility.

The least visible of the steps taken the last year or so has been the commitment by the church to attain charter status with the Fellowship. To do this, we must have a "full-time" pastor. And that position has to be funded at a Conference approved level.

This year, CMCC has taken strides toward that goal and hopefully God will continue to guide us that way. CMCC will be increasing that funding level as quickly as possible in the future.

Offering Statistics (for October)

Offering	\$5,810.31
Attendance	702
Building Fund	\$276
Community Assistance	\$122.50

As that monthly budget requirement increases, our giving needs to be consistent. During your personal consideration of your tithe commitment for 1995, please include a commitment to consistency month-to-month. That way the finance committee will be able to see what increment steps can be placed in the budget.

Even while away on vacation or business, the church budget commitment still need to be regular.

Allan Francis, Treasurer

Fighting the Religious Right

(Here is part of Rev. Mel White's remarks during the 1994 North Carolina Gay and Lesbian Pride March.)

The Religious Right meets on Sundays, uses misinformation, hyperbole, half truths and lies to manipulate and destroy. So what can we do to keep the Religious Righteous from doing more wrong?

1. Know who they are and what they are saying. Tune them in.

2. Begin to collect their books, their magazines, their direct mail pieces. Find the passage that are most offensive. Put them on display.

3. Begin to video tape their television harangues, their radio sermons and talk shows. Make the tapes available to your friends. Create listener guides.

4. Start your own version of a local Holocaust museum. Be sure your friends and neighbors see the similarity between Hitler's Third Reich and the current tactic of the Religious Righteous (Hitler's first political action committee was the Committee Against Abortion and homosexuality).

5. Begin immediately to build networks of support inside and outside the "les-bi-gay" communities. Isolation will lead to our own undoing. Find mainline pastors, priests, rabbis and politicians who oppose the Rhetorical Right(eous). Invite them to visit, to share, to lunch.

6. Organize your coalition to call radio and television stations quoting the offenders, suggesting they be taken off the air and following up with public or even legal pressure when the inflammatory rhetoric continues. Write letters to the editors complaining

against the columnists of the Religious Righteous.

7. Create a list of the common words and phrases used by the Religious Righteous to mislead and misinform. For example, "Special rights," "gay agenda," "sexual preference," "gay lifestyle," and "ex-gay." Discuss these words and phrases with others. Help them combat these words in their daily conversations with friends and workers.

8. Find your most eloquent spokespersons and create a speaker's bureau, offering talks, panels, discussions, on the rhetoric of the Religious Righteous to luncheon clubs, mainline churches, schools and such.

9. Use their own video tapes, like "The Gay Agenda," to illustrate the hate-mongering methods of the Religious Righteous. Remember the more our non-gay/lesbian friends and neighbors hear of the extremists, the more they will understand our plight and our cause.

10. Commend TV and radio programs that take on the Religious Righteous or oppose their causes. Support Sponsors who don't give into their blackmail. Praise politicians who dare to stand against them. Organize against the anti-gay measures. Provide voter registration cards at church.

11. Don't shout back with our own over-implications, our own halftruths, our own lies even if they support our point. Tell the truth. And, above all, believe in our cause. Truth will win the war!

(This article has been edited. It appeared in its entirety in: *In Unison Magazine*, July 1994 issue)

Perspectives **Sea Change**

It is November in Alabama. As the force of the sun wanes, the days alternate between crisp, clear skies and gray washes of rain. We prepare for deeper winter by pulling sweaters from cedar closets and stocking shelves with food. We fold away summer cotton clothes and the joys and pains we felt when we wore them. We move with cautious steps into the realm of winter introspection. It is a prayerful state in which all our senses are focused and we are better able to discern beauty in common things.

November introspection is good. It is a time in which the sounds and events of everyday living surround us and carry special import. For instance, when we turn down the blare and intrusion of morning news, we can hear the sound bites of the immediate universe around us: The dog scratching, ice settling in the glass, the floor creaking, warm air whirling

from the register. These are comforting, primal sounds, and God is in them as we listen.

But God is much more than the enfolding sounds of a November room. Paul Tillich, a modern theologian, says God is a "sea without shores, surface or floor" in which we bathe. He means God is everywhere and is with us not only in the warmth of our rooms but also in flow of events beyond our doors.

In the last few months I have consciously tried to see and feel God in the common events that surround me each day. And as the introspection of November continues, I find it easier to do.

First, in the October AIDS walk, I felt God was with me. In the sea sound of comradeship old fears were dissolved, and I was buoyed up in strength. In the current of the walk, my Sargasso sea of indecision was transformed into a mounting wave of resolve

and action. I felt I was decisive and doing good with God's help. I am sure others at the walk felt the same way. In diversity we acted as a unified strong force for good.

Later in the week when I saw *Shindler's List*, I felt that the music and acting were a cohesive whole, a sea surge that strongly swept the horror of the Jewish holocaust into my consciousness. It was a God inspired movie which showed me that even in the storms of horror and brutality, one imperfect person with the help of God can buoy us all up and give promise of a better tomorrow.

On a Sunday in church, I sat rapt with my brethren as songs of freedom poured over us celebrating the birthday of MCC. I felt as if I were floating in a sunny sea, and as I gazed outward, I could hear nothing but white-cap waves churning up the endless possibili-

ties of the future. I felt that with God's help, like the supporting power of the sea, I could do anything and need not be afraid to act.

You may have noted a tone of optimism approaching joy in the paragraphs above. It is a tone that is rare, I assure you, for me, but it is a tone becoming ever more dominant as I heal and strive to be God conscious in this world. I do not think I am unique in this. I think we all as Christians are healing and finally claiming the joy that is our birthright as sons and daughters of God.

So as my November introspection continues here at the keyboard, I am hearing deep tones that signal a sea change. I would be remiss if I did not share my feelings that there is a sea change coming for all of us. As the hymn says, "God is the future." God is the present as well.

John Foust

Potpourri

What must it be like?

What must it be like to step on shore, and find it ... heaven;
To take hold of a hand, and find it ... God's;
To breathe a new air, and find it ... celestial;
To feel invigorated, and find it ... immortality;
To rise from the care, the loneliness, and turmoil of earth
Into one unbroken calm;
To wake up and find it ... glory!

Burning Candle

May this candle you burn, never end,
I found in you, such a good friend.
You help me choose the path that is right,
when you burn the candle, to shed some light.

A friend with thoughts I share,
hoping you know, I always will care.
You told the truth, knowing I could deny,
you put faith in me, when I didn't know why.

I just wanted to say, you are my best friend,
may Lord Jesus be with us till the end.
Burn this candle to show what is right,
during our walk with Jesus, glory will be the light.

Tim Welch

New Education Material Here

What happens when God truly moves among us, and people are invited to act and speak on behalf of God's grace and justice in their lives and world? The Word Among Us is designed to help us experience God's word alive in us. This material uses literature, art, and scripture to bring us in contact with God. One class for young adults from 16-23 will be using materials for older youth, and the other class will be using adult material. I have no idea which class you will feel at home in. (You may be forty and feel like 23! You may be younger and feel like 16! If you feel like a hundred, you probably belong in the adult class!) I particularly invite our older children of gay parents to join the older youth class.

People are given the opportunity to be in either class. The materials relate to the church year and the common lectionary; so that what is being preached in the worship service is being reinforced in The Word Among Us.

A Methodist pastor classmate at Springhill College once complained that the "average Sunday School class is the greatest detriment to the life of faith in

November Lectionary Passages

(for home preparation)

11/02: Ruth 1: 1-18, Hebrews 9: 11-14, Mark 12: 28-34

11/09: Ruth 3: 1-5, 4: 13-17; Hebrews 9: 24-28; Mark 12: 38-44

11/16: I Samuel 1: 4-20, Hebrews 10: 11-25, Mark 13: 1-8

11/23: II Samuel 23: 1-7, Revelation 1: 4b-8, John 18: 33-37

11/30: Jeremiah 33: 14-16, I Thessalonians 3: 9-13, Luke 21: 25-36

America." This material is not that! It is more than Sunday School. This material will expand your faith and your knowledge. It will open your heart, and train your mind! It is very much in keeping with MCC's theology and prac-

tice, and you will not have to translate it to make it fit your experience. It teaches independent thinking and will lead you to

imagine, make decisions, and solve problems. There will be two teachers for each adult class and they will either alternate or team teach. We have purchased two leader's manuals and six student manuals for each class. Please do not remove the student manuals from the church, but use them in class. We will print the lectionary selections for each week in the newsletter each month, so you can read the scripture in advance.

An additional resource *Imagining the Word: An Arts and Lectionary Resource* is available at \$29.95 (hardcover) and \$24.95 (paperback) at Cokesbury.

Come, join us at 10 a.m. on Sunday mornings and share this growth experience.

Take a Breather

Do you ever feel guilty when you sit down to relax? Do you walk fast and inhale your food? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you're probably a person with Type A behavior. That's not something to be proud of because you may be on your way to serious health problems.

Researchers say there are two distinct types of behavior patterns in people: Type A and Type B. Type A people are emotionally charged, self demanding, and push themselves to achieve more and more. Studies show more half of the American public fits Type A behavior.

Type B people find themselves in less stressful situation. They make up about 40 percent of the

American public, according to studies. Some ten percent fall into a mixed category, having characteristics of both Type A and Type B.

Here's the typical behavior pattern for a Type A person.

1. Always moves, walks, and eats rapidly.
2. Feels, particularly if he openly exhibits it to others, an impatience with the rate at which most events take place
3. Becomes unduly irritated or even enraged when a car in front moves at a pace he considers too slow.
4. Finds it intolerable to watch others perform tasks he knows he can do faster.
5. Finds it difficult to restrain from hurrying the speech of others.

6. Feels guilty when he relaxes and does absolutely nothing.

7. Attempts to schedule more and more in less and less time.

8. Does two or more things at once, like reading while eating, or working, while talking on the phone.

For Type B persons, the typical behavior pattern is this:

1. Is relatively free of all the habits that enslave the Type A person.
2. Plays for fun and relaxation and doesn't try to display superiority over others.
3. Doesn't suffer from a sense of time urgency with its accompanying impatience.
4. Attempts only one task at a time.

Not surprisingly, research in-

dicates people with Type A personalities are much more prone to heart attacks. Here are some ways to avoid Type A behavior and possibly dodge health-related problems:

1. Strive to complete one task at a time.
2. Awaken five or ten minutes earlier each morning to allow for such things as reading the newspaper or taking a walk.
3. Schedule lunch in a nearby park and away from the people and problems of the day.
4. When you find yourself in a hurry, ask yourself, "Must I do this right now?" and "Will it really matter five years from now?"

Rick Allred

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Covenant

T I M E S

DECEMBER 1994

Waiting & Hoping

What Advent is to me.

*A*dvant is a time in the Christian Church's "life cycle" when we wait and Wait and WAIT! It's hard to wait. Waiting is always accompanied by questions ... sometimes uncomfortable, sometimes fearful, sometimes unanswerable questions. Outside the Church our lifestyle seems to require: hurry, Hurry, HURRY! Instant meals, instant money machines, instant service support our hurry mentality. Waiting seems to be despised. But, as a Christian community, together at this time we say "WAIT!" Wait? for what?

"What do you want for Christmas?" We hear this asked often during this season. But this simple question broaches a larger, quite difficult question for us: "What do you really hope for?" Can you hope at this time of your life or



are your fears overcoming your hoping? Will you hope? Hope for what? Remember the song, "Do you know what you're hoping for?..." Advent is a time for asking questions of ourselves and God; and giving them space in our thoughts. What counts in life? What is essential to wait and hope for? As a Christian community,

together at this time we say, "HOPE! Hope for God's presence to become more real in your life."

In your waiting...

Choose hope. Overcome fear.
Find peace. Silence rage.
Nurture joy.
Get over past wounds.
Discover true love anew.

In your hoping, remember...

One bright star in the expansive dark sky can lead you Home. Uncomfortable stables in our lives are likely places to find God's Love.

Our worship through music at Covenant MCC will reflect our waiting and hoping. Don't look for Christmas songs too soon. We have some waiting and hoping to do first. HOWEVER, on Sunday, Dec. 18 at 7 p.m. we will celebrate the Christmas story through the choir's presentation of "Share the Good News! He is Born!" by Allen Pote. This will be an exciting musical worship experience. Please plan now to attend and bring your friends. Let the music bring alive the Christmas season for you.

*Your sister in Christ,
Susan Walker, choir director*

Happy Holidays



Marge's Musings

We like shepherds wait

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night..." (Luke 2:8)

It has always interested me that God's announcement of Jesus' birth was made to shepherds. Shepherds were despised by the orthodox of Jesus' day. They were unable to keep the ceremonial law; they could not observe all the rituals of cleanliness demanded. The sheep made constant demands on them preventing them from being ritually clean, and the orthodox looked down on them. To these shepherds God's message came.

On the other hand, these may have been special shepherds, those who kept the Temple flocks, the perfect offerings that were demanded by the Law. These flocks were pastured near Bethlehem. Were they the ones who were first told of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world?

God always had a way of touching those who were reviled by the orthodox. Maybe things really haven't changed. Maybe God is touching us, despite what some Christians would have us

believe. If God could reveal Himself to ritually unclean shepherds in a time long gone, could God be revealing Himself to those of us whom the world regards as unclean? I think God can do whatever God wants to do, and nobody can tell God to do otherwise! The Bible tells us the Spirit moves in whomever it chooses. Let us rush with the shepherds to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass. We'll be in good company. A Merry Christmas to all of you, and a very happy New Year.

Pastor Marge Ragona

More than two dozen worship at Tuscaloosa MCC

We had to bring in extra chairs so everyone could have a seat. After only two services the Tuscaloosa-based Parish extension of Covenant MCC has had an attendance of 29 people from Tuscaloosa, surrounding areas, Birmingham and Montgomery.

The group currently meets at the Holiday Inn on McFarland off I-20 at 4 p.m.

The group will continue to meet at 4 p.m. for the month and will examine whether that is the best time for Tuscaloosa.

Worship services are open to all people regardless of race, age, gender or sexual orientation. Children and parents are also welcome.

John Hankins, pastoral leader in Tuscaloosa, commented on the fact that when you have a ministry people will

come and participate. A parent himself, he talked of the number of children and teenagers who attend and take part in worship at Covenant. His daughter even took part in the Tuscaloosa service by leading the children's moment.

If you know of someone in the Tuscaloosa area, please let them know we are in town sharing the news of God's inclusive and affirming love.

Goals workshop planned

Setting goals for the next five years is the plan for a Goals Workshop Saturday, Dec. 10 at 10 a.m. Several areas of church business will be

discussed including worship and Christian education.

The meeting is especially important if we as a church are interested in moving in this next

stage of maturity and growth from being a commissioned church in our district to being a chartered one, which is the next step toward autonomy.

Deacon's Diary

Our tools and gifts

Someone has imagined the carpenter's tools holding a conference. Sister Hammer presided. Several suggested she leave the meeting because she was too noisy.

Replied the Hammer, "If I have to leave this shop, Brother Screw must go also. You have to turn him around again and again to get him to accomplish anything."

Brother Screw then spoke up. "If you wish, I will leave. But Sister Plane must leave too. All her work is on the surface. Her efforts have no depth."

To this Sister Plane responded, "Brother Rule will also have to withdraw, for he is always mea-

suring folks as though he were the only one who is right."

Brother Rule then complained against Sister Sandpaper, "You ought to leave too because you're so rough and rubbing people the wrong way."

In the midst of all this discussion in walked the Carpenter of Nazareth. He had arrived to start His day's work. Putting on His apron, He went to the bench to make a pulpit from which to proclaim the Gospel. He employed the hammer, screw, plane, rule, sandpaper and all the other tools.

After the day's work when the pulpit was finished, Brother Saw arose and remarked, "Brothers

and Sisters, I observed that all of us are workers together with the Lord."

God is a god of variety. In nature, what a diversity of animals! Every snowflake is different, every fingerprint, every face. Likewise, God is a god of variety in God's church. What a diversity of gifts God has bestowed on believers to equip them for service!

ADAPTED FROM LESLIE B. FLYNN'S
19 Gifts of the Spirit

What better time than at Christmas can we work together using the gifts God has given us.

*Wishing you many
Christmas Blessings,
Your Deacons*

Covenant 2000

What will Covenant look like in the year 2000? It isn't too soon to think about it. As a part of our application for charter status, the board must put together a set of five-year goals. The goals must cover such areas as worship, Christian education, outreach, and evangelism, to name a few. In a recent building committee meeting we discussed what our physical plant (the

building) might look like in the year 2000.

Will we buy our current building or will we outgrow it first? Will we build a new church from the ground up or buy an existing church? Whatever we do, we will need money in the building fund and lots of it. If we put \$500 per month in the building fund in 1995 and increase that by \$100 per month each year, we should have around \$100,000 by the

year 2000. That isn't enough to pay cash for anything, but it might make a good down payment. Most importantly, it is realistic and very attainable if we all continue to give to the building fund over our regular tithe. Even \$5 or \$10 per month adds up with interest.

What is your dream for Covenant 2000? Make it real, give faithfully to our building fund.

Steve Parker

Christmas gifts for BAO

Birmingham AIDS Outreach prepares more than 300 gift boxes that go to people living with AIDS and to children. We can help buy a little something extra for BAO's Adrian Daniels's Memorial Holiday Gift Box

Project when we shop. Purchase a stuffed bear and a gift of food (canned meat and vegetables, brownie mixes, soups), clothing (new men's women's and children's) or fun items (books, tapes, CDs, Christmas ornaments, cash) to help fill these gift boxes.

Shannon will coordinate efforts from MCC. Contact her for more information.

BAO will host a box wrapping party Saturday, Dec. 3 and a box filling party Saturday, Dec. 17, both at 10 a.m. at their offices in the Swann Building, 2nd Avenue South.

Covenant

published by
Covenant Metropolitan
Community Church

5117 1st Ave. N.
P.O. Box 101473
Birmingham, AL 35210
599-3363

Worship Service

11 a.m. and 7 p.m.

Sunday School

9:30 a.m.

Pastor

Rev. Marge Ragona

Student Clergy

John Hankins,
Andy Mullins,
Greg Bullard (Huntsville)

Deacons

Cal, Shirley, Kay, Cliff

Newsletter Staff

John Foust
Co-Editor
Mark B. Moore
Art Director

Submissions to the Covenant Times newsletter are welcomed and encouraged. If possible submit work on 3 1/2" diskette in either Macintosh or IBM, DOS, Windows format.

December 1994

C A L E N D A R O F E V E N T S

1 Thursday

Bible Study
7 p.m.

4 Sunday

Sunday School
9:30 a.m.
Worship
11 a.m.
Worship
(Tuscaloosa)
4 p.m.
Worship
7 p.m.
Dramatic Reading
Dottie as Elizabeth

6 Tuesday

Choir Practice
7 p.m.
Council of Ministries
8 p.m.

8 Thursday

Bible Study
Gospel of Luke
7 p.m.

10 Saturday

Goals Workshop

11 Sunday

Sunday School
9:30 a.m.
Worship
11 a.m.
Worship
(Tuscaloosa)
4 p.m.
Worship
7 p.m.
Dramatic Reading
John F. as Herod

12 Monday

Board Meeting
7 p.m.

13 Tuesday

Choir Practice
7 p.m.

15 Thursday

Bible Study
Gospel of Luke
7 p.m.

17 Saturday

Choir Practice
2 p.m.
Christmas Banquet
6 p.m.

18 Sunday

■ **Building Fund Offering**
Sunday School
9:30 a.m.
Worship
11 a.m.
Worship
(Tuscaloosa)
4 p.m.
Christmas Cantata
7 p.m.
Dramatic Reading
Mark M. as Melchior

19 Monday

BAO Service
7:30 p.m.

20 Tuesday

Choir Practice
7 p.m.

22 Thursday

Bible Study
Gospel of Luke
7 p.m.

24 Saturday

Candlelight Worship
10:30 p.m.

25 Sunday

■ **Christmas Day**
Sunday School
9:30 a.m.
Worship
11 a.m.
Worship
(Tuscaloosa)
4 p.m.
Worship
7 p.m.
Dramatic Reading
Michael B. as the Innkeeper

26 Monday

Deacon/Staff Meeting
7:30 p.m.

27 Tuesday

Choir Practice
7 p.m.

29 Thursday

Bible Study
Gospel of Luke
7 p.m.

District Conference

As most of you know, Covenant had two lay-delegates representing us at conference because we now have over 100 members. Shirley Lambert was appointed by the board to serve as second lay-delegate until our congregational meeting in January.

The Wilmington conference was the largest GLAD confer-

ence ever: over 250 registrants and an estimated 500 people in worship service Saturday night.

We had a productive business meeting. Here are some highlights.

Three district committee members were re-elected without opposition. They were Sharon Lindenbaum as clerk, Reid Christiansen as clergy rep, and our own Dennis Luft as trea-

surer (Yess!!!)

A by-laws change to require that every fall conference be held in Atlanta failed to achieve the two-thirds vote required for a by-laws change.

A resolution passed requiring each church to elect a contact person to serve as representative the Womens Secretariat. See Carol C. for information on this. (She went to their meeting.)

The next District Conference will be held in Montgomery in May 1995. We need to bring the banner home! Don't forget that General Conference will be held in Atlanta in July. Be there or miss out! Fall 1995 District conference will be in Ashville and the Spring 1996 conference will be in Nashville.

Steve Parker

Perspectives

Inclusive language—a special gift for us

We have something special here at CMCC—the all-inclusive love of God. Since coming here that knowledge has been a strength, but at our fellowship's district conference in November the truth of that ideal became even more real.

It was my first conference and each activity touched me intellectually, spiritually or emotionally. In the worship services, workshops and even the business meeting the power we possess as God's children was evident. People from various churches discussed problems and successes they had experienced in their Christian walk and church government. In one workshop concerning inclusivity, I was proud to find that CMCC's children's moment and children's church were excellent tools for including parents and children in our church family.

As a group we discussed

why we use inclusive language. We all agreed it isn't to appease a group of angry lesbians, but rather to free us from constrained images of God and move us toward seeing God as everything we need and more than we can comprehend. Inclusive language, as a theology rather than a dictate of what pronouns to use, addresses more than gender issues.

I and another African-American person discussed how a positive attitude concerning inclusive language can purge images of God as being a white male figure. I grew up in a black church, but when I put a face on God, it was that of a silver-bearded white man. When as a child I questioned what color is God? Is he like us? The answer was something along the lines of God is black for blacks, white for whites, etc. The concept I think is to be comforting and say God is for everyone, but it rings of a separatist attitude to me. Like-

wise the woman felt people of all races at times find self image issues when trying to picture God. Inclusive language when used well can describe God as beyond beauty, all-loving, caring like a parent, without boxing God into a small package.

Phrases like "rise as you are able" step to insure that people with disabilities feel more comfortable. The use of sign language in many of our churches is another way we work to be inclusive. So the issue truly is more than when we say "he."

As a group we agreed saying mother instead of father in some sort of checks and balance mentality was jarring. And we also agreed that for many the idea that our heavenly parent could be the good father instead of the missing or abusive one we may have had growing up is a good one. Truly we can celebrate in our diversity of the images and feelings we have for God. Most importantly we must respect one

another, by not jumping on someone's back if they say "he" or "father" and also by not holding firmly to the use of strong male imagery simply in opposition to authority figures.

Both of the workshops I went to dealt with issues concerning men and women. The tensions that sometimes exists between the genders baffle and concern me. I am sure that future conferences will feature workshops that address other issues important to me.

Returning from conference I felt energized and saw much of the same renewed enthusiasm in my peers who returned as well. I encourage you to attend future conferences to share, learn, make friends and continue our ministry.

Indeed, we have a great ministry as long as we stay focused on Christ and pass the knowledge of God's love to those around us.

Mark B. Moore

Heartbreak Christmas

A short story by Marcus Allison

She is staring out the window watching the lights from the building across the street. Red, green, and blue — the colors of Christmas. The lights flash on and off.

"Meow," cries Rusty. He's our cat. Well, I guess he's my cat now. Rusty pokes his nose through the items scattered on the floor: After-shave lotion, a box of chocolate covered cherries, a pair of warm socks, and a white teddy bear.

I pick the items up and place them back in their box. It was that teddy bear that really got me and sent me over the edge. That's when I sent the box flying across the room straight into the wall. I could have sworn my mother had called them and told them about Joey.

"Come here, baby," I call to Rusty. He snuggles up to me. His

brown coat of fur rubbing against my arm feels like silk.

"Oh, Rusty, how are we going to make it without our Joey?"

I look back at the Christmas lights. Christmas, Christmas, I think. What does it really mean. Well, I know what it's not going to mean without Joey. There will be no tree filled with blue lights and strings of popcorn. There will be no melt-in-your-mouth sugar cookies. And if I hear one more person wish me a Merry Christmas, I'm going to scream.

Later, the ringing phone wakes me.

"Bobby, you told me you'd consider coming home for Christmas. (It's my mom, she never gives up.) It's Christmas Eve, Bobby. Are you there?"

I am silent with my head against the pillow. For a moment I tune her out. I don't want to

speak, but finally my anger bursts forward.

"How in hell do you expect me to come home with him there. He didn't even send a card, didn't even call and say I'm sorry. What kind of father is that? But that's just the way he is. Isn't that what you were about to say?"

"Bobby, please. Let go of all that hate. It's killing you."

I grow silent again lost somewhere back in time. I remember the night I told him I was gay. He just looked at me and walked out of the room. We didn't speak for two years after that. And when I tried to tell him about Joey, to try and explain about the AIDS virus, and the pain of living on borrowed time, he simply said "Why do we have to talk about it."

Mom continues to plead with me, but I don't want to hear the words. So I hang up. But she

calls right back and does the unexpected; she put him on the line. I told you she doesn't give up.

"Bob, this is your daddy. I know you don't want to talk to me, but I'm... I'm..."

Well, son, I'm sorry, I guess."

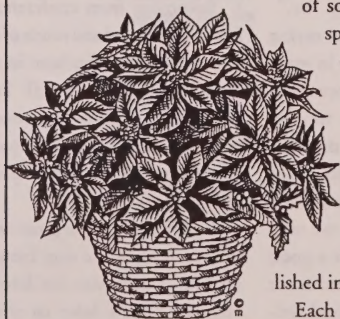
His voice breaks away, and mom is back on the line. But there is silence as I search for my answer to the question about coming home for Christmas. Like a whisper I recall Joey's voice. "Please, make peace with your father."

Now as Rusty and I drive away from Birmingham to Atlanta, I feel Joey's presence. It's as if his hand is touching my face. For the first time since his death, I begin to cry. As the tears slide down my face, I realize I'm crying not so much for the loss of my lover, but for myself, and my father. As I start to pray, I call out to Jesus for healing on this painful Christmas day...

Christmas Flowers

It is the custom at Covenant to surround the altar Christmas day with poinsettias. This year you can order your poinsettias ahead of time.

If you would like to place a poinsettia on the altar in memory of someone or for someone special, or just for the joy of it, contact John Foust.



He will make sure the poinsettia you order gets on the altar Christmas Sunday and in addition will add your name to the memorial list to be published in the bulletin.

Each poinsettia plant will cost \$8 dollars.

Book Review

Annah Whitall Smith in her book, *A Christians Secret to a Happy Life*, defines the happy life of a Christian as a life free from worldly burdens. The burden-free, happy life is like the life of a little child. "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18: 2-3).

What are the characteristics of a little child, and how does it live?

The child provides nothing for itself, yet everything is provided. The child lives by faith! How much faith do you have? Can you live the life of a little child?

Smith's book also includes a chapter on temptation and an encouraging one on faith.

Most of all, Smith's book is written in clear, easy-to-read language and is available from our church library. I recommend it.

Timothy T. Burkett

Perspectives

Journeys Home

Gay and lesbian Christian people are like the wise men traveling to the birth of Jesus. We come from many places, but we follow the same freedom star all the days of the year to the home of homes in Bethlehem. We travel through trials and tribulations each in our own way and learn to bear joyfully and bravely the sorrows the turning world imposes upon us. When we get home on that wondrous day, we put our treasures of strength and the small gleanings of wisdom at Jesus's breathing side knowing that in the year to come these treasures will be returned to us ten fold.

Some of us are from the desert. It is a place of stark contrasts. The shadows are dark; blanchd stones reflect the sun's light fiercely. We of the desert take great joy when we find a small pool of water or a wild tree full of apples. We know the patterns of the night sky

and sometimes see there things to come. We can rejoice in the small things and great things that sustain us, and we see in all things God's great bounty.

Desert people travel at an unhurried pace over the stark landscape of the modern world. At night beneath the gleaming star, we are pulled safely along the freeways. Wheels hum beneath us, comfort us, and carry us past the evils that lurk along our path. With a steady pace we progress expectantly toward Bethlehem. A box of treasured joy rides beside us in the front seat.

Some of us live beside the wide winding rivers. Here the roots of trees grow deep to drink the waters of life seeping from the rivers' sides. Mists rise up from the loam; a golden haze

ishes the orchards, and rolling hills of grass are the table upon which God's sheep feed. The river people are the keepers of bounty and know intimately the cycling of life and death and life again. They cherish seasons. They value healing and husband the river gardens in which God's sustaining powers enter our bodies and souls.

River people pass silently through the lush lands. On the dark waters they move. The ripples from their ships move out through the universe reflected on the water. The water seems to breathe, rise and fall. Huge sails fill with the night winds. The rudders guides us along the path of the major star and steer us through the mud banks and shoals to Bethlehem. We stand confident at the helm while below deck a cedar chest of balms and medicines rides secure and dry.

Some of us live high in the mountains

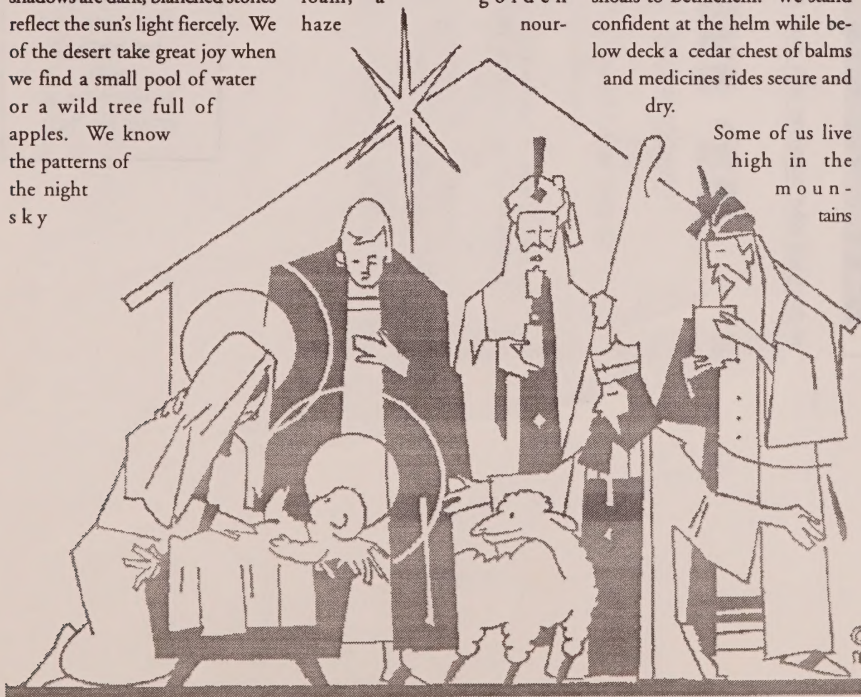
where cities of stone cling. Snow melt fills deep cisterns. Firs whisper; eagles and hawks glide in strong updrafts; giant telescopes turn on quiet rings. Observers write down in books the natural events they see around them. Numbers dance across computer screens expressing truth in abstract form. All our words and sums explore the great diversity of this world and the universe.

The mountain people fly in airplanes. Powerful, cunning engines lift them up into the air. They watch and speculate as they glide through towering clouds... unknown places. Here the star light is strong; it gleams to illuminate darkness and ignorance. Mountain folk are like lesser angels carrying messages of hope and truth through the world. We carry satchels of wisdom and speculation locked securely to our wrists.

Thus with wheels, sails, and wings we come. We join, humble as we walk along the avenue of stars that leads to the home of homes. There where the major star hesitates above the chimney, doors of light open wide. All radiant possibility welcomes us and flows forth like a stream from the room where Jesus rests. The Lord's eyes open. We kneel, bend, offer up our joys, our balms, our speculations. All things are made new in the Creator's glance.

It is Bethlehem; it is the Lord's birthday. It is the well-spring from which all things flow and are made new. "Rejoice, rejoice and be glad in it."

John Foust



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the world might be saved. **John 3:16-17**

God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, that everyone who has faith in

DON'T BELIEVE 'EM

When they say "God hates fags."
you.

We are a church of believers and we would like you to
join us and learn about God's love.

Sunday School for children and adults 10 a.m. • Worship Service 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.
Choir Practice Tuesdays 6 p.m. • Bible Study Thursdays 7 p.m. (call for directions)



Covenant Metropolitan Community Church

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him may not perish but have eternal life. It

was not to judge the world that God sent the Son into the world, but that through him

The Ten Commandments: Are they religion or Are They Statute?

Before determining whether the Ten Commandments belong in a courtroom or any other government office; we must first determine the essence of what they really are. Let's look at several of the ten commandments.

Consider the commandment: "Thou Shall Not Steal." Our jurisprudence seldom uses the word steal. But it is connotated by words such as burglary, shoplifting, larceny, auto theft etc. Nonetheless all of these are acts of stealing. Why bicker over one word. This commandment is definitely statute and has a place in our courtrooms .

Consider another one of the ten commandments: "Thou Shall Not Kill. " In our jurisprudence this means thou shall not commit murder, manslaughter or any form of violence against anyone else. This commandment can go so far as to include misdemeanor assault and battery. There is definitely a place for this commandment in our courtroom it is statute.

Finally let's consider the first commandment: "I am the Lord thy God thy shall have no other Gods before me" Here we are treading on shaky ground. This commandment declares the existence of a diety known as the Lord and institutes theocracy. An atheist would never allow this in our courtroom. This commandment is a belief system and not all my share this belief.

In conclusion when it comes to God and law only one thing can be agreed upon with absolute certainty. This diety known as the Lord is simply not fictitious in law. He has a group of organized statutes which is his own jurisprudence.

Timothy B`

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Timothy B

Covenant

T I M E S

August 1994

Mother Eagle, welcome

By John Foust

Part of the vision of the Covenant MCC congregation became manifest Sunday, July 24. We called and voted unanimously to accept the Rev. Marge Ragona as pastor. Energy was high. The announcement of the vote was greeted with a standing ovation and cheers.

Marge, who now is called fondly The Reverend Mother by many in our family, has found a place with us. As many testified before the vote, she began to affect our lives positively long before the election. Many stated that her teaching and wise thoughtful counsel bring us all closer to God. She continues unfailingly, they said, to strip us of the excess baggage that anchors us to despair, so that our journey up to freedom may be easier.

In an interview with Marge on Saturday before the election, I discovered that the freedom to soar up to God has long been Reverend Marge's focus. I found out why the symbol of the eagle's high flights

into the sky is one of her favorites. The brief survey and episodes that follow only begin to define the eagle personality of Marge Ragona.

I suspect that her career has been high flight ever since 1973 when she circled the block several times at MCC New York and finally swooped in the door.

Although Marge was raised in a family of Christians, became a nurse, joined the Baptist Church, followed a path in religious education, was a teacher of children and bore two sons and a daughter, she found her new wings when she flew to New York. Years earlier, she was born there, and she began an MCC ministry there that continues to this day.

Marge began free-eagle life as student clergy in New York where she studied for three years. In 1977 she was invited to be director of women's ministries in Boston. Marge told me about two interesting things that happened to her in Boston the year she was there: she

was licensed by MCC and tapped for her intimate knowledge of Baptist psychology.

She remembers 1979 as a big year personally and politically. Personally she was buoyant about receiving her license. In New York her license had been turned down in spite of her qualifications, but in Boston she was found to be qualified. "I was embraced and loved there," she said.

Politically 1979 was the year of Anita Bryant. In Boston and in many other areas of the country, gay organizations combated the venom that issued forth from Anita Bryant and the homophobic organizations that supported her. Marge's knowledge of how Anita and her fundamentalist friends thought enabled Boston gays to defend themselves.

The politics of 1979, however, gave way to the call of MCC Providence, R.I. Providence was the first church Marge pastored. She rose like an eagle to meet its needs.

Marge told me that she landed in Providence a "single lesbian mother with two children of 11 and 17 years." Not only that! She was to embrace a flock that included 17 lesbian mothers, three gay fathers and 47 children.

How well she must have been able to empathize with those people. While there, she said she often felt "like a priest, since most of the Providence MCC members came from Italian and Irish backgrounds." She related two interesting stories about this time. They give us a hint of what it must have been like in these early days of gay activism. One story is called "The Fast" and the other is called "The Blessing of the Fleet."

About this time, Troy Perry began a fast in California in response to a proposition on the California ballot. In sympathy with him, the clergy of Marge's district decided to go on a fast as well. She and members of her church sat for 10 days fasting on

See **Rev. Mother**, next page

*Marge's Musings***The People's Vision****"Without a Vision, the people perish." (Proverbs 29:18)**

People ask what *my* vision is for the church and I cannot help but answer that the vision must come from the people. If the people do not have a vision of what they want the church to be, it will not happen. Sometimes the pastor has one vision and the people have another and nothing will happen.

I know the kind of church I want to be associated with and if that's a vision, I can share that. First, I want an inclusive and diverse church, one where ev-

eryone feels welcome and has a sense of belonging—a Church that cuts across racial, national, economic and all other barriers and lets everyone feel that this must be what the reign of God on earth is like.

Second, I want to pastor a financially responsible church. We must not live beyond our means, but be forward thinking enough to plan and save, so that when an opportunity for a building, for example, presents itself we will be ready because we have had the fore-

sight to make ourselves ready.

Third, I want us to remain a Christ-centered church. Ours is still a very wounded community with many hurting people, many people looking for roots and grounding, hungry for some center for their lives. I believe they can find that in the open, loving kind of Christianity we offer. Jesus said, "If I am lifted up I will draw all people unto me." I would like us to lift up Christ for all to see, embrace, and follow. There is much healing

available through a relationship with a loving God. Our community can find that at Covenant.

I thank Covenant MCC for calling me as pastor. As I see it, the pastor's task is to equip, facilitate, teach and enable people to do whatever it takes to make *their* vision a reality. I hope, with God's help, to be able to do that at Covenant. It's *our* church and together we can envision the future and work for its realization with God's enabling power. ■

Rev. Mother*continued from page 1*

the steps of the federal courthouse in Providence. She said the nights and days spent there were a free time even though there was the possibility of violence and confrontation.

The second story, the "Blessing of the Fleet" is more personal and shows how Marge is able to meet adversity with humor. At Christmas, many of the church children were not going to have a toy. It would have been a dreary Christmas indeed without the laughter and delight of children. A member of the congregation and a motorcycle club member thought he could remedy that situation.

The motorcycle club that year required a toy for admission to its Christmas party. Those toys were presented to Marge later in giant bags and the toys were distributed to the children. To thank the club, the church invited the motorcycle club members to a supper at which Marge blessed the entire motorcycle fleet. I, personally, would have loved to have been there to see the club drive off in their leather jackets with full stomachs knowing they carried the personal blessing of Mother Marge with them down whatever road they drove.

Marge stayed in Providence for two years. The

stories and events that followed her pastorate in Providence are many and rich. Each one is an inspiration to me since I am a person of great inaction. Perhaps Marge will relate some of them to us in the future when we feel tied in the bonds of lethargy.

After Providence, Marge went on to serve vigorously in Ventura, Calif., where she saved a failing church, returned to Boston as pastor for a while, was called to return south to Pensacola, Fla., and later founded the MCC church in Mobile in 1985. Finally she went to Atlanta with Shirley, her spouse, and then came to us. Now,

God willing, Marge and Shirley will stay with us awhile.

Marge has been a wonderful teacher as well as pastor wherever she has been these last 20 years. The many years of study in various schools give her the knowledge to sort out many thorny theological issues that concern gays and lesbians everywhere and us in particular. We welcome you, Mother Eagle. You can surely lead us bravely under God's banner and give us the intellectual tools we need to fight the ignorance around us. You can help us grow strong in God who arms us for the days to come. ■

Deacon's Diary Silence Speaks

"...just for background noise?"

Unless I build a breather into my schedule, it won't happen! I have to make an effort to set time aside.

Sound familiar?

There is a time for all of us to be still before God. Quieting ourselves means resisting our urge to go out and do something.

Our culture has conditioned us to accept noise and crowds. We sometimes place a higher value on parties than on weekends alone. How many people do you know who turn on the TV or radio when they are alone, "just for background noise?"

Nothing in our hurried lives places an importance on solitude or silence. We

all seem to be driven by a force that says, "Live a fast food life! Hurry. Hurry. Hurry!"

Jesus withdrew frequently into solitude and silence. In Matt. 4:1-11, we are told how his ministry was launched after forty days alone. After feeding five thousand, He headed for solitude (Matt. 14:23).

He also instructed his disciples to do the same. After they returned from ministering, he told them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (Matt. 6:31).

Many of us hesitate, and sometimes we become anxious before entering long periods of solitude and silence.

There are so many things in life that seem to possess us and claim us. We in turn claim and possess others.

It is in times of silence and solitude that we can begin to untangle ourselves and sometimes get the answers we have been searching for.

Solitude and silence can help clear the dust from our thinking and wipe clean the windows of our vision. Often we receive gifts from our struggle with silence and solitude.

We may get ourselves back, and even more important is that we may have a more intimate relationship with our Creator. ■

—Deacon Shirley

Perspectives

Choir Anyone?

Raise your voice to God

Never did I imagine I would enjoy it so much, but for the greater part of a year I've been a member of CMCC's choir, and it has been *fun*.

I had no musical training and had never sung in front of a group, but being part of a choir was something I always wanted to do.

Like other groups in the church we are a family. We

pray and comfort, laugh and love, and we always have room for more.

As I said, I am not a trained singer. Sometimes I breathe in the middle of a word, and sometimes I must have someone else sing my part so I can learn it. So don't feel intimidated. If you think the choir might be for you, be sure to try it out.

We have a particular need for sopranos. You may have noticed our soprano section has been dotted with male voices for some time.

Practice is Tuesdays from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

We have a workshop Sept. 24 at 10 a.m. to get ready for the Christmas Cantata. Consider joining us. ■

—Mark B. Moore

Covenant TIMES

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Rev. Marge Ragona,
Pastor
John Hankins, Student Clergy
Deacons
Cal, Shirley, Kay
Newsletter Staff
Mark B. Moore, editor
Marcus A.
Timothy B.
John F.
Michael R.
Timothy W.
Philip B.
Allan F.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Already...

Already another month is gone and it's newsletter time. You may notice a few changes in the look of the newsletter. I have seen some of the design problems, and I am trying to find solutions that will be reader friendly and accommodate more text.

Putting that text into this format is a team effort. The staff is growing, but we still would love more help from anyone wanting to write, type or fold.

Interested? Just stop me in church or call 823-9320.

—Mark B. Moore

Perspectives

Nothing's Impossible

Unexpected occurrences are proof positive

Recently, I embarked on the adventure of my life; a trip to California to see Barbra Streisand in concert. Although I almost can't believe it really happened, I have two T-shirts to prove it.

The mere acquisition of the concert ticket was the greatest miracle because as many of you know the Tour of the Century (as it was nicknamed at the very start in London) was sold out! Way back in March when I called TicketMaster in Los Angeles, it was like a steel rod being driven into my heart to hear the words "sorry sold out!"

Now of course you'd have to know my history to understand this sort of adoration. For me admiring Barbra Streisand has been similar to a thirsty traveler finding a spring of cold water in a barren land. Through so much of the desert she has helped make the journey bearable.

I recall one long, hot Carolina summer spent in my mother's trailer. A time when no one cared much for a sixteen-year-old boy who longed for acceptance. Those were the days before the CD player when we had to contend with turntables and scratchy needles. I would toss Barbra's *Lazy Afternoon* album on my

record player, and spend my own lazy afternoons lost in fantasy.

Eventually, of course, I left that trailer and moved on. But the fantasy continued and I held on to Barbra as tight as ever.

Ironically by the time she had directed *The Prince of Tides* (a film about childhood trauma) my own childhood issues had surfaced, almost to the day the film opened. So, I always felt this deep connection to Miss. Streisand. Even when my relationship with Gary begun to fall apart, it was the knowledge that Barbra had survived a similar situation that helped me hang on. This may sound crazy but it's true.

The last couple of years has brought many changes in my life. Learning to live alone again and taking care of myself have been difficult at times but also rewarding. Being involved with MCC has been a lifeline for me. With the church I've started to realize that people care very much about what happens to me. With the church I've started to realize that God loves and accepts me right where I am! I've started to believe in the possible rather than the impossible. I even wrote down the words

"nothing's impossible." Just a word of caution: Be careful of what you write down; it just might come true!

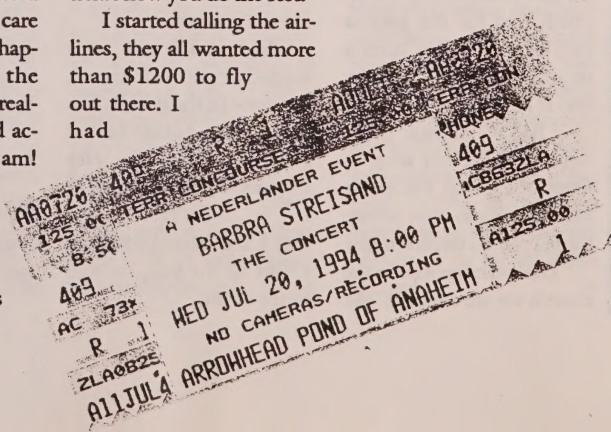
In early July I was in the break room at Office Depot reading the newspaper. In the paper I learned that Barbra had added two more shows in New York. Could this be another chance for me to see her live, I thought. I picked up the phone and placed another call to TicketMaster. I would have to call TicketMaster in New York, I was told. But just sort of offhandedly I asked, "You don't have any tickets left out there do you?" "As a matter of fact we do," she said. My mind raced with the question: Dare I buy this ticket? A small still voice inside said to go for it. But how in the world would I get from Birmingham to Anaheim, California? The voice inside spoke again—"I've given you the ticket now you do the rest."

I started calling the airlines, they all wanted more than \$1200 to fly out there. I had

no money. I called my mother and started begging, she could come up with some but not that much. But then I called USAIR. "I was about to quote you a price of \$1200 but for some reason they've put a discount on this one," the operator said. A mere \$441. I was on my way. But what I haven't told you is that back in May when Barbra was scheduled to sing in Anaheim she got laryngitis. So she had to reschedule four concerts until July.

The arena is called The Pond. The name always fascinated me. Somehow I always knew I'd be there. So, on July 20 when against all odds I arrived at the parking lot of The Pond and saw that billboard flashing out in rose colored letters BARBRA STREISAND IN CONCERT, I knew in my gut that nothing's impossible!

—Marcus Allison



Happenings Christmas in August

Celebration comes early at CMCC—Aug. 21

Because many of us are out of town during the Christmas Holidays in December, Christmas in August will give us the chance to celebrate Christmas with our Church Family.

Instead of exchanging presents, we will be giving gifts to our church, in honor of the birth of Jesus.

Plus this way you can avoid the usual long lines, and full parking spaces.

We will celebrate at both services. Following the morning service will be Christmas dinner. The church will provide the main dish. Please bring a vegetable or desert.

Listed below are some suggestions for gifts to the church.

WISH LISTS:

paper plates
styrofoam cups
plastic cups
napkins
paper towels
copier paper
(all sizes and colors)

GIFTS TO FUNDS:

Building fund
Piano fund
Community Assistance
Anniversary fund
General Conference fund

OTHERS:

Bears for BAO's
Holiday Gift Box Project

The poem above was composed during the Christmas memorial service two years ago. I did not know that it was to be my last Christmas with my friend Randy. We both knew, however, that God could call either of us to leave at any time.

Now Randy is with God, and I am heading to graduate school at Ole Miss. But the feelings we had for the people of Covenant MCC remain the same. In a time when the world wants to take everything away as soon as it is deemed "used" I thank God that we found a congregation of God that accepts used people.

As we celebrate Christ-

mas in August and give by God's example, let us each remember that we may be "used goods" by some people's standards, but God has a purpose for even worn out light bulbs. As I leave Birmingham, I'm anxious about the future, but just because I may sometimes view myself in a negative light does not mean that I can't have a positive effect on others. At MCC many of us have learned that it's alright to glow—to glow in the way that God made us to glow, not as the world would have us burn.

Also, sometimes, the times I would pretend to be shining brightest, I'm really rather dull. On the other hand, the times I

barely scrape through and hope that no one sees, I'm often amazed how others will see what I have forgotten. God is with us always. Thank you, my sisters and brothers, for helping me see God's light in my own life, even though I thought my filament was burnt out.

I will miss my family at CMCC, but I will be back from time to time. As a final note, it is my wish to bequeath to the church a stained glass statue that was made in memory of Randy. The statue is in need of restoration, and it might not be to someone's liking. Therefore, if anyone has any feelings about the piece, please talk with me about it. ■

—Michael Raines

Lights on the Christmas Tree

The tree was speaking, or so the pulpit said

"Each limb of life testifies in green,

Each strand of lights speaks when seen."

But there a string of lights were mute; they were dead

Behind the circle's corner tucked back left in the tree

Their message means more than electricity

Those lights are still there, we just don't see

Their simple, quiet statement of complexity.

Blackened Christmas lights,

Blackened Christmas star

Contain the glowing feeling

For scattered friends, so far...

'Hang me up!'
August 1994

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2 6p Choir 7:30p Council of Ministries meeting	3 7p Special Study Course "Healing Grief"	4 7p Bible Study	5	6
7 11a Worship 7p Worship	8 7p Board Meeting	9 6p Choir	10 7p Special Study Course "Healing Grief"	11 7p Bible Study	12	13
14 11a Worship 7p Worship	15 7:30p BAO service (call for info)	16 6p Choir 7:30p Excel: Sharing with Friends	17 5:30p Youth Meeting 7p Special Study Course "Healing Grief"	18 7p Bible Study	19 7p Fun Night Carpet Golf	20
21 Christmas in August BAO Food Drive 11a Worship 1p Christmas 7p Worship	22 6p Deacon Staff Meeting	23 6p Choir	24 7p Special Study Course "Healing Grief"	25 7p Bible Study	26 Excel Weekend	27
28 11a Worship 7p Worship	29	30 6p Choir	31 7p Special Study Course "Healing Grief"			

Fun Night

Set aside some time Friday, Aug. 19 for carpet golf at Magic Mountain in Vestavia. There is an 8-person minimum per group.

The cost is \$3 for 18 holes or \$4.50 for 36 holes. Payment is due before play begins. The evening begins at 7 p.m.

Fall Retreat

The date of CMCC's Fall Retreat is fast approaching. Join us Sept. 10 at Cheaha State Park for the annual event this year titled "Fairie Tales and Bible Stories."

Included in the weekend will be baptism by immersion, spiritual growth exercises, fun and familyship in the mountains.

There is a suggested donation of \$5 per person, \$10 per family. Please give as you are able and felt led.

Healing Grief

There are many types of losses: family, friends, jobs, homes. The grief can linger. The death of someone close is the most difficult loss, but all need healing. Come to the new Wednesday Night Study Series: "Healing Grief and Loss," and help heal yourself. Meetings are at 7 p.m.

Excel Weekend

Many from our congregation will attend the Excel of the Rainbow Zebra spiritual retreat at month's end.

Keep them in your prayers for blessings and a safe return.

Help Wanted

Covenant is a growing church. We have a variety of programs that need committed people at the helm. Read over the list of open positions at CMCC. Pray. And then see Marge if you are interested in helping in one of these areas.

Sunday School teachers
(pre-school—3rd grade)
(4th—7th grade)
(adult: 30 and above,
alternating Sundays)

Children's Church
(teens and adults needed)

Children's Choir Director

Lord, I'm asking

Lord, forgive me, I have gone astray,
all I ask is for you to show me the way.
Show me the difference of day and night,
coming from you, it has to be right.

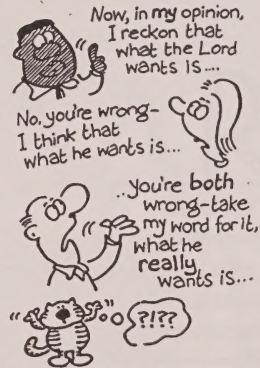
God, your love is pain,
through you, we forever gain.
Forgive me for things I have done in the past,
temporary detours, they never last.

Lord, I ask you to guide my heart,
especially during those times we are apart.
Take my hand,
tell me the difference of loving woman or man,
and please Lord, make it so I can understand.

Lord, I ask you to take me in,
at your presence, I want to begin.
Through you, we gain knowledge and power,
your beauty is giving us another hour... Amen.

Tim Welch

GOD is...



GOD is...



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Covenant T I M E S

F E B R U A R Y 1 9 9 5

ANNIVERSARY

CMCC celebrates anniversary with concert and workshops

Covenant Metropolitan Community Church asks, "Where will we be in the year 2000" as the church celebrates its 14th anniversary.

Several events are planned, from Feb. 26 to March 5, to entertain and educate members and the community.

The celebration begins with a concert by David and Jane Sunday, Feb. 26 at 7 p.m. David Heid and Jane Syftestad draw from backgrounds in contemporary Christian and traditional gospel music to form their unique sound known for its musical diversity and complexity. A reception follows.

Heid is the music director for St. Johns MCC, Raleigh, N.C. and will serve in the same capacity at the UFMCC General Conference in Atlanta this summer. He was formerly on staff at the renowned Juilliard School.

Syftestad is music director at MCC Los Angeles and has been guest conductor at the World AIDS Day Remembrance Interfaith Service in L.A.

Will Grega's *Gay Music Guide* describes David and Jane saying, "They are jump up on your chair and wave your hands and say 'hallelujah' kind of fun, with first rate originals and stirring covers."

UFMCC founder Rev. Elder Troy Perry says, "Jane and David have a powerful and spirit-led ministry. At the 1991 General Conference, they tore the house down! They are gifted young musicians that bring the love of



God alive through their music."

March 1 marks the Ash Wednesday service. The service begins at 7 p.m.

Beginning at 10 a.m. on Saturday, March 4 special guest Dr. Rembert "Buddy" Truluck, pastor of MCC Nashville, will host a series of workshops on topics like "The Bible as Your Friend," "Sharing Your Faith," and "The Bible and Homosexuality." Truluck will also preach at the Sunday morning service.

Plan to attend.



Sunday, Feb. 25

7 p.m.

Concert by David & Jane

8:30 p.m.

Reception

Wednesday, March

7 p.m.

Ash Wednesday Service

Saturday, March 4

10 a.m.

Workshops with

Dr. "Buddy" Truluck

Sunday, March 5

11 a.m.

Truluck preaches at morning service.

*Marge's Musings***Epiphany: A time to share the good news**

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of our God has risen upon you." Isaiah 60:1

Next to Easter, Epiphany is the oldest season of the church year. In the ancient world Epiphany had been celebrated since the second century C.E. It usually begins on Jan. 6, with a celebration both of the birth (with the visit of the Magi) and with the baptism of Jesus. Jan. 6 was chosen because it was the winter solstice, a festival celebrating the birthday of the sun god. In 331 B.C.E. the solstice was moved to Dec. 25, but Jan. 6 continued to be observed. Christians substituted Epiphany for the solstice. The emphasis was on the rebirth of light.

When Dec. 25 was chosen as the birthday of Jesus (and he really may have been born in June), the Greek churches continued to

celebrate Epiphany in terms of the baptism of Jesus, while the Roman churches associated Epiphany with the visit of the Magi. For the East, the baptism was more vital because of the gnostic heresy claiming that only at his baptism did Jesus become the Son of God.

The name Epiphany means "manifestation." The light manifests itself in the darkness, God is revealed in Jesus, and the glory of God is seen in Jesus. Epiphany is a fairly long season this year, lasting until March 1, Ash Wednesday. The ordinary color of Epiphany is green, with white being used to celebrate Epiphany Day, the Baptism of Jesus, and the Transfiguration. Green is the color of growth and during Epiphany we grow into a fuller

realization of the nature of Christ as God's very special gift to humanity.

During Epiphany, we celebrate Christ as the light of the world. Jesus comes into the world as a baby, a frail candle. He becomes the light that enlightens the world. Jesus reveals, shows, manifests God. Throughout Epiphany the light of God's glory is seen increasingly until the Transfiguration, when his clothes and face are as bright as the sun. At the end of Epiphany, we see the light of Christ at its brightest, but Jesus burns himself out on the cross, only to be rekindled at Easter.

Epiphany is one of the most important seasons of the Christian year, because the preaching and teaching done establish the divinity of Christ — the glory of

God manifested in Jesus. It is a time to share your faith with another person, one who does not know God as you do. It is a time to tell someone the good news of your faith, that light has come to a darkened world. For me it is a time to tell the world that the faith of gay Christians is real, and that it brings light to our brothers and sisters who only believe in the condemnation of the world. Jesus says, "I have come, not to condemn the world, but that through me the world might be saved." Reach out, touch someone's life with good news. Share the light you have received with them. Let their lives be brighter; you'll be happier, too, and we will all bask in the light of our savior.

Rev. Marge Ragona

*Deacon's Diary***A Baptism of Christ**

"And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Mark 10:38b

That was the latter half of a question Christ put to James and John when they asked a special favor. They desired to sit one on the right hand and the other on the left: positions when one is seated represent power and closeness.

Such a simple question, yet one which carried the weight of the world: the \$64,000 question. My question has often been "What was the baptism Christ spoke about?" Was it a baptism of rejection, suffering, and death?

Was it a baptism of self denial and self sacrifice? Was it a baptism of love, mercy, and compassion?

In a world full of rejection, suffering and death we certainly do not need their baptism. Frankly, I've had enough of them! As for self denial and sacrifice, well ... enough is enough. So that leaves the last one: a baptism of love, mercy, and compassion.

Jesus said "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's

life for one's friends." (John 15:14). To lay one's life down, not in death but in service; not in suffering but in rejoicing. We as Christians are often too quick to make statements like "I will gladly die for Christ." The saints of old did not become saints only because of their deaths. They became saints because of the life they lived.

Christ is not wanting us to die but live, to give our best to ourselves and to others. God's love and service does not stop because

we mess up. God's love is forever. God's love is unconditional. The Psalmist said "God's mercy endures to all generations." No matter where we are or our frame of mind, Christ's love and mercy is there to hold, protect and lift us up. In a community where hurting, pain, and rejection is the "norm" God's love is a safe tower. This year I ask you my friends to join with me in seeking a new baptism: a baptism of Christ's LOVE.

Deacon Cliff Tinney

CMCC has new goals and a new board

Covenant will face many challenges in 1995 as we move into some new programs, new goals and a new status with the Fellowship. At the congregational meeting, we passed a set of goals and progressive budget that will allow CMCC to attain the status of 'Charter Church' within UFMCC. A couple of the requirements for this include paying our pastor a full-time wage and meeting our monthly budget on a consistent basis.

The regular members and friends of the congregation pledged almost 90 percent of the

monthly budget of \$6,486. An additional \$550 per month was pledged to the building fund. The challenge now is for consistency in meeting the monthly pledge plus bringing a few friends that hopefully will fill in the other 10 percent to reach the budget.

Our average gift per person attending each Sunday last year was \$8.20. If we can increase that giving to \$10 per person per week, the budget is met easily.

Remember that there are envelopes available for cash contributions. Fill in the information so that the pledge amount can be

properly sorted.

We have designated the third Sunday as Building Fund Day. Those that pledged to that fund can give any time but an additional emphasis will be made that day for others to designate their special giving.

Four board members elected

Four board of director vacancies were filled at the Jan. 15 congregational meeting. Long-time board member Dennis Luft was elected to fill the position of clerk, a 2-year term. Mark Moore was elected to the other 2-year term and elected vice-moderator. Carol Cowley and William Berry were each elected to 1-year terms. The four join treasurer Allan Francis and pastor Marge Ragona on the board.



Quilting Bee moves weekly

A group of quilters are meeting each Sunday afternoon at Covenant MCC.

At the first meeting on Jan. 22, a video of the Quilt was shown, panel specifications were dis-

cussed and plans were made for equipment and materials.

There will be a display, dedication and presentation to the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt on June 3.

A quilting bee becomes a com-

munity effort to not only make a memorial to those who have been taken by AIDS, but a healing process for those making the panels. Anyone can make a panel for anyone. The bees are held at 2 p.m. Sundays in the reception hall.

GENERAL CONFERENCE

HOTLANTA

JULY 23 - 30, 1995

General Conference is in Atlanta this year at the Westin Peachtree Plaza. Reservations should be received by June 23. Room prices range from \$78 to \$83) Conference registration is \$180 for non-delegates (\$220 for registration received after March 31). Weekend registration is \$110 in advance, \$135 on-site. See Steve Parker for additional details.

Covenant

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Rev. Marge Ragona

Student Clergy

John Hankins, Andy Mullins
and Greg Bullard (Huntsville)

Deacons

Cal, Shirley, Kay, Cliff

Newsletter Staff

John Foust, Co-Editor
Mark B. Moore, Art Director

Editor's Note

I am taking a little space to say thanks for all of the help I've had with the newsletter, from organizing, to writing, to folding.

I also want to encourage you to submit to the newsletter. We accept short stories, poetry, editorials, testimonies and more. But if writing is not your forte, we always appreciate help in folding, typing and other tasks. At Covenant there are other committees for which you might find your talents especially suited. Greg Adams is the new chairperson of our SHOE (Social, Hospitality, Outreach and Evangelism) Committee. These are just two places where you might consider helping. Contact Rev. Ragona, Greg Adams, John Foust or Mark Moore if you're ready to help.

February 1995

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			Study Course 1 Healing from Spiritual Abuse 7 p.m.	Bible Study 2 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	3	4
NAMES Project Quilting 5 2 p.m.	Gay Parents Meeting 6	Choir Practice 7 7 p.m.	Study Course 8 Healing from Spiritual Abuse 7 p.m.	Bible Study 9 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	10	11
NAMES Project Quilting 12 2 p.m.	Board Meeting 13 7 p.m.	Choir Practice 14 7 p.m.	Study Course 15 Healing from Spiritual Abuse 7 p.m.	Bible Study 16 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	17	18
Sharing with Friends EXCEL group 5:00 p.m.		Newsletter deadline				
Building Fund Offering 19	Gay Parents Meeting 20	Choir Practice 21 7 p.m.	22	Bible Study 23 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	24	25
NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.		Deacon Training 8 p.m.				
CAF Offering 26	Deacon and Staff Meeting 27 7 p.m.	Newsletter production 28 6 p.m.	Every Sunday Sunday School for adults and children 9:30 a.m. Morning Worship 11 a.m. Worship (Tuscaloosa) 4 p.m. Program rehearsal 5:30 p.m. Evening Worship 7 p.m.			
NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.		Choir Practice 7 p.m.				
Concert 7 p.m.		Deacon Training 8 p.m.				

Readings for this month

February 5

5th Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 6: 1-13

I Corinthians 15: 1-11

Luke 5: 1-11

February 12

6th Sunday after Epiphany

Jeremiah 17: 5-10

I Corinthians 15: 12-20

Luke 6: 17-26

February 19

7th Sunday after Epiphany

Genesis 45: 3-11, 15

I Corinthians 15: 35-38, 42-50

Luke 6: 27-38

February 26

8th Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 55: 10-13

I Corinthians 15: 51-58

Luke 6: 39-49

What is Excel?

A question perhaps many of you may have asked lately. We have been announcing from the pulpit and in the bulletin the last couple of months about the Excel retreat coming up on March 31, April 1, and April 2. The following is an explanation of what Excel is.

In 1949, a Roman Catholic priest and a team of lay people founded "Cursillo," an exercise in lay renewal. Since then the Cursillo movement has spread around the world.

Hundreds of thousands of people have experienced a deepening

of their faith and involvement in the life of the church through Cursillo. The Methodists have a similar program called, "The Walk To Emmaus" and the Presbyterians, "Living Waters."

In 1975, Rev. Richard Mickley adapted Cursillo as a one-time special retreat for UFMCC's Los Angeles Congregation. That first weekend was so popular that the group continued the weekends. Soon people throughout UFMCC heard about Excel and traveled to Los Angeles to attend the exercise.

During 1980, "Excel in the Redwoods," in the San Francisco Bay area, formed and conducted their first weekend with the assistance of the "Excel in the City of The Angels" team, from Los Angeles. This marked the beginning of the growth of the Excel movement. Also

formed that year was "Excel in the Desert," Phoenix, Arizona. The word had spread that this program of lay education and renewal was not only needed but would make a positive contribution to the life of local congregations. The history of Cursillo in the early 1950s was repeated in Excel in the early 1980s.

There are many Excel teams all over the United States, and in at least five different countries. The Excel movement is continuing to grow.

Excel is an exciting weekend of renewal and spiritual growth. It is an exercise in Christian community living held in a setting that provides participants with a message and a method for balancing their personal spiritual life and an active Christian life within their home church.

The Gulf Lower Atlantic District's team was formed after "Excel of the Suitcase," an Excel team consisting of members from teams from all the country, put on a weekend for our district about three years ago. After two years of training, the "Excel of the Rainbow Zebra" was formed. The weekend coming up at the end of March is our third weekend. The team is made up of people who have been participants at an Excel weekend, helped as a friend at an Excel weekend, and have been through extensive team training. The Excel of the Rainbow Zebra team is made up of people from Atlanta, Birmingham, Boone, N.C., Charleston, S.C., and Gastonia, N.C.

The Excel of the Rainbow

Zebra weekends will always be held within our district which includes: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. The team tries to keep the weekends as centrally located as possible, depending on availability of sites, so everyone will have an opportunity to attend. The March 31 through April 2 weekend will be held near Toccoa, Ga. The site is at the very base of the Appalachian Mountains.

The weekend begins on Friday evening and ends on Sunday afternoon. All events during the weekend build upon each other, so participants must plan to attend the entire weekend.

There are registration forms in the foyer of the church, or you can call 956-6418 to request a form, or more information. We can only accept a certain number of participants for each weekend, so sign up as soon as possible. Remember, this weekend is open to our entire district.

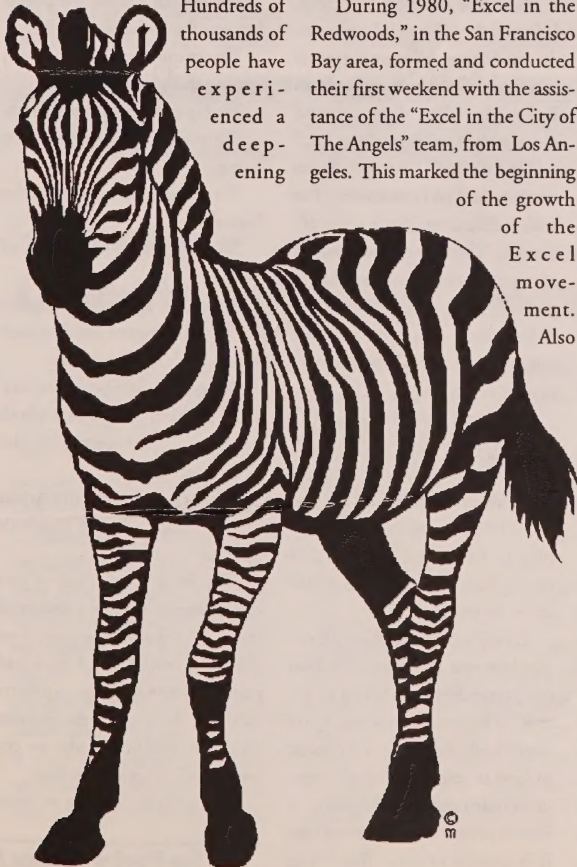
We have a lot of Excel graduates at CMCC. You will know them by the rainbow stoles they are wearing. Attending a weekend will let you know where our name, Excel of the Rainbow Zebra, comes from.

The word Excel comes from 1st Corinthians 12:31, "And I will show you a still more EXCELlent way."

We hope to see you there!

*Your Excel of the Rainbow
Zebra team members from
Birmingham,*

Shirley, Kay and Cal



*Perspectives***What Psalm 22 means today**

*M*y life has been full of new beginnings. That is why during the days of Advent before Christmas, I was filled with feelings of hope and renewal. I think many of us were. Sunday after Sunday the candles of the Advent wreath were lit until finally the Christ candle was lit.

For me it was an explosion of joy. Joy returned to me during Christmas. The dark shadow and grief of my lover's death three years ago just before Christmas had healed.

What does this healing mean? For me it means that I am no longer encumbered by personal grief and that I have been healed into a new body which I put on during the celebration of Jesus's birthday.

Now, however, the celebrations are over. Mary and Joseph have fled to Egypt. The Magi have gone home. The shepherds have returned to their everyday duties. The star of wonder is eclipsed as the horizon of the world looms ever larger.

With our healed bodies and minds we return again to the old, turning world. And we find that its news is full of repetitive, depressing stuff. The news saddens us. The world's stories are a big let down from the joy of Christmas.

For me the big let down occurred this week during a business trip. My new healed body and mind was buffeted with despair as I watched the news on CNN where the inflow of the world and its doings is continuous.

First, there was the ceaseless gossip and rumor surrounding the O.J. Simpson case. Why, I asked myself, was there so much morbid curiosity about misfortune? Why

had it happened anyway?

Then came Bosnia. The weary reports of continuing slaughter and fighting. How, even when truces are declared, can murder continue? Truces are made to be broken, I thought. Its so predictable. Will killing and war always continue in this weary world?

There were reports on TV. Research reveals new strains that are resistant to all our drugs. The new TV is a story of how a disease, once nearly eradicated, is storming back in spite of all that modern science can throw at it. Is there no end to the viruses that the world throws at us? How frustrating to optimistic science, that for every two strides forward, the winds of the world push us back one.

It went on like this. Story after story. All were depressing and filled with mockery. Finally I had enough of this self whipping. I turned the TV off. I thought of reading an escapist novel. That had worked in the past as a way to relieve pain and anxiety. But it didn't work this time. The author's words, which once had seemed so clever and entertaining, were stale and predictable. I mean, what did I care about the homo-erotic concerns of nineteenth century vampires. I closed the book with a snap. It was not enough.

I had not brought my Bible but I felt like I needed to read it. So I picked up the Gideon bible from the night stand beside my bed. I was going to let it open up anywhere and start reading. I opened up the front cover. Neatly placed in the center of the cover page was a label inscribed with a skull and crossbones. Written beneath the emblem were the words, "Warn-

ing, the words inside are not true and are hazardous to your health."

"Cute," I thought. "Real cute."

Now I don't know anything about the Gideons, but I was certain they had not put the skull and crossbones label in the front their Bible. Not thinking, intuitively, in an act of anger, I tore the label from the book. I felt that the label was just another intrusion from the world... in fact, at that moment, I felt that the placing of the label in the book was an act of Satan. It was a temptation placed before me to read no further.

Now that the Bible was clean, I allowed the Bible to fall open randomly. My eyes fell upon the words which you heard read earlier from Psalm 22: "Many dogs surround me, a pack of evildoers closes in..."

"What's this?" I thought. It was another skull and crossbones. But with a difference. Such a big difference. These words were part of a lament written long ago and were probably sung in the first temple in Jerusalem. An ancient poet cries out against the world's evil and sorrow. It's a prayer.

The poet's prayer rings out with truth in our world as well. Why? It is obvious. Evil never changes and is always with us.

As I read the psalm from beginning to end several times, I saw clearly how the psalmist's words apply to us today.

It begins, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me, far from my prayer, from the words of my cry?" The poet's first words speak emotionally, humanly, and directly to God in response to some event unrecorded and long forgotten. It doesn't matter what the event was. It is enough to know that it was

something deeply disturbing to the poet and to the tribes worshipping at the temple as well.

Today these words are still disturbing and full of power. Are they not?

They are still inspired by the breath of God. Are they not?

They still strike chords of fear in us. And well they should.

Jesus Christ cried them out on the Cross as He suffered. He cried them out because he was fully human and felt human pain. And we gay Christians today, cry out as well. Do we not?

We cry out against the plague that eats the ranks of our tribe.

We cry out against the delay in fighting this plague.

We cry out against early death.

We mourn the athlete dying young.

We mourn the historian John Boswell.

We rail against the death of friends.

We cry out against the Religious Reich: those bigots and Pharisees who rub salt in our wounds.

We cry out against hypocrites: those political snakes that speak sweet words in the temples but bite us in the dark.

We rail against those that would impose their perverted standards upon us.

The list is long. Each of you could expand the list a thousand times. And it would be good if we did. The crying out of hurts and pain is a cleansing thing... a prayerful thing. That is why the psalmist cried out, and that is why we cry out as well, every day we live.

And what else did the psalmist

Psalm

continued from page 6

say to me that evening in my motel room: "I am like water poured out; all my bones are racked. My heart has become like wax melting away within my bosom."

The psalmist says, "I am full of fear." He prays about the human condition called fear. The poet feels he has been drained of life, that he is numb with torture, that his once brave heart melts under oppression.

I felt the power of these words instantly when I read them. Not only are these words a description of the human fear Christ felt on the Cross, they are also a description of the fear gay people have in this world that "surrounds them like dogs." The dogs have the fangs to attack, to rend our flesh, and to crucify. We know the dogs of fear. I fear every one!

I fear Nazi and skin-head thugs.

I fear charlatan preachers preaching hate to innocent children.

I fear clever talk show hosts who feast on guile.

I fear fat scientists who gorge themselves on money never intending to find a cure.

I fear that my rights as a human being, my freedoms will be taken away.

I fear whispering behind my back.

I fear confrontation.

I fear gays who pander to those who scorn us.

I fear what a simple kiss may bring.

I fear change even though I may be bound in chains.

Think about your fears. They surround you like a pack of dogs. Confront them, one by one.

Quit your smiling. Yes, you. You are the one I'm talking about.

Offer each snarling cur up to God. Do not hide them. Do not pretend they are not there. Show them to God. Say, "God, I am afraid." For if you do not, they will multiply and grow even stronger.

Like the psalmist says, "Rescue my soul from the sword, my loneliness from the grip of the dog."

But there is an up side to this. When we have born all these griefs and fears up to God, and pleaded for rescue, we are lifted up. And like the poet we can sing, "So by your gift will I utter praise in the vast assembly; I will fulfill my vows before those who fear God."

This phrase is like the last lines in a sweeping epic. All the tribes are called in to stand before the high king. All personal foes have

been conquered, and those others... those dogs whining from the distance... are kept at bay.

I closed the Bible. I felt lifted up. I felt that dull depression had given way to high hope. I knew we must remain vigilant for our children, that we must continue to bring our tribe home, help heal and make them strong. I felt that our time in the wilderness was nearly over, and that God was about to lift us up to our own promised land.

I think the following verses will always remain in my mind, and that they prophesy the future of our gay tribe:

"Let the coming generation be told of the Lord that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born, the justice God has shown."

John Foust

*Perspectives***Love's longing answered by God**

Everyone longs to give themselves completely to someone...to have a deep soul relationship with another...to be loved thoroughly and exclusively. But God, to a Christian, says, "No, not until you are satisfied, fulfilled and content with being loved by Me alone...with giving yourself totally and unreservedly to me...to having an intensely personal and unique relationship with me alone, discovering that only in me is your satisfaction to be found will you be capable of the perfect human relationship that I have

planned for you. You will never be united with another until you are united with me...exclusive of anyone or anything else, exclusive of any other desires or longings.

I want you to stop planning, stop wishing, and allow me to give you the most thrilling plan existing...one that you cannot imagine. I want you to have the best. Please allow me to bring it to you. You must keep watching me, expecting the greatest things...keep experiencing the satisfaction that I am. Keep listening and learning the things I

tell you. You must wait, that's all. Don't be anxious. Don't look around at the things others have gotten or that I have given. Don't worry. Don't look at the things you want. You must keep looking off and away up to me, or you'll miss what I want to show you. And then when you're ready, I'll surprise you with a love more wonderful than any you would dream of.

You see, until you are ready (I am working even this moment to have both of you ready at the same time.), until you are both satisfied exclusively with me and

the life I prepared for you, you won't be able to experience the love that exemplifies your relationship with me, and thus the perfect love. And dear one, I want you to have this most wonderful love. I want you to see in the flesh a picture of your relationship with me, and to enjoy materially and concretely the everlasting union of beauty, perfection, and love that I offer you utterly. I am the God, Almighty. Believe it and be satisfied.

An anonymous piece submitted by Eddie Merrell

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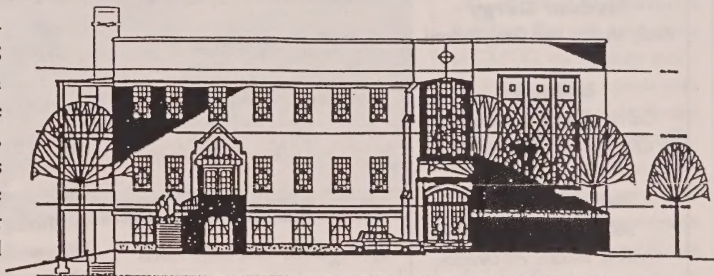
T I M E S

THE NEWSLETTER OF
COVENANT METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

from SILENCE to CELEBRATION

Much more than pride for CMCC this weekend

In two short days, the church will recognize friends and loved ones lost to AIDS with a quilt panel dedication, usher in the formation of Covenant's own AIDS Care Team, march in the city's Gay Pride Parade, have a picnic in Rushton Park, host Inquirer's classes, focus a sermon on the church's response to AIDS and kick off a campaign to sponsor an apartment in Agape House as a memorial to former pastor Rev. Cliff Morrison.



Food and fun at Rushton

Fun and food will cap off Saturday, June 3 as we throw down blankets and fire up the grills for a picnic in Rushton Park. The picnic starts at 5 p.m., but the day's activities really begin at 10 a.m. with Inquirer's classes. The classes are necessary for membership, but can be attended just to learn more about CMCC and the Universal Fellowship of MCC's. Two sections will be taught in the morning and the group will break for lunch. The topic of the Bible and homosexuality will be addressed in the afternoon session.

CMCC choir and pastor guests at Birmingham Pride '95

Once again Birmingham has moved Pride Day to the beginning of June from month's end. Join us to march in the parade or visit our booth where we will be passing out literature and where the kids of our newly-expanded children's ministry, "Covenant Kids" will sell watermelon and Gatorade.

Under the direction of Susan Walker, the CMCC choir will sing several selections including Marsha Stevens' "I Still Have a Dream" at 3:15, followed by a speech from Pastor Rev. Marge Ragona at 3:45. The events take place at Rhodes Park, Sunday, June 4.



CMCC responds to AIDS with quilt, care team and speaker

A presentation and dedication of panels for the NAMES Project Memorial AIDS Quilt will be held Sunday as well.

Persons having a new panel to present to the quilt can display at this event and it is open to the general public.

The display will be from 5 to 6 p.m. and the dedication will be at 6:15 p.m. The panels displayed will be packaged by CMCC and shipped to The NAMES Foundation in San Francisco to be sewn into the massive national project.

Indeed CMCC is no stranger to AIDS. The evening worship service at 7 p.m. will be focused on AIDS. Dr. Malcolm Marler, chaplain at Birmingham's 1917 Clinic will be the guest speaker.

At this service, we will dedicate the formation of our own AIDS Care Team which will go through training through the 1917 Clinic.

A care team is composed of 10-12 individuals working to care for someone living with AIDS. To register for training there is a \$10 fee per person which covers lunch and training materials. CMCC's goal is to have two teams

CMCC plans to raise \$7,500 for AGAPE House, above, which will be the home of the Cliff Morrison Memorial Apartment. AGAPE houses people living with AIDS.

Covenant

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Pastoral Leader, Tuscaloosa

Rev. Elect John Hankins

Student Clergy

Andy Mullins and Greg Bullard

Deacons

Col M., Shirley C., Kay H.,
Cliff T., Mark B., Eddie M.

Newsletter Staff

John Foust, Co-Editor
Mark B. Moore, Art Director

MARGE'S

BY REV. MARGE RAGONA

From Silence to Celebration

*If God is for us who is
against us?... Who will bring
any charge against God's
elect? Is it God who justifies?
Who is to condemn?... Who
will separate us from the love
of Christ? Will hardship or
distress or persecution or
famine or nakedness, or peril
or sword... No, in all these
things we are conquerors
through the One who loved
us. For I am convinced that
neither death, nor life, nor
angels, nor rulers, nor things
present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor
depth, nor anything else in all
creation will be able to
separate us from the love of
God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

ROMANS 8:31FF

The year was 1974. I was a grade school teacher come home to New York after 12 years in New Orleans, Louisiana. I had not been home for too long when I experienced my first Gay Pride Parade. I was standing in front of my favorite women's bar (the Duchess at Sheridan Square) watching the parade form. I thought about marching, but also thought about how I had applied for and taken the exam for grade school teaching in New York and thought it highly unlikely that I would be hired if I was seen on TV or in the newspaper walking in a Gay Pride Parade. I was just paranoid enough not to realize what the odds were of my being singled out, a middle aged, ordinary dyke, with no distinguishing characteristics. Who would want to see me on TV? Why would any news photographer snap me. I certainly wasn't news, what with all the flamboyant ones they could show. I was one of tens of thousands of 'ordinary' gay people, marching for our lives.

In 1975, I had already joined MCC New York. That year I did march, wearing a T-shirt that said "God is a dyke's best friend!" I marched with about 30 people from MCC New York with the women of the church and hid by carrying the banner, so that if any photographer showed up I could duck my face behind the banner we were carrying head high. I wasn't quite as afraid of being seen, but I still wasn't entirely out.

In 1976, I took marshal's training from the Quakers, learning nonviolent ways to deal with harassment along the parade route. I carried a pocketful of buttons that read "I am a Gay Christian!" and passed them out along the route.

I pinned one to the seat of the pants of a guy carrying a "You are going to burn in hell" banner that must have been eight feet tall. He fought that banner all the way to Central Park, most of the time fighting headwinds that threatened to tear it out of his hands, and we all wished the wind well. He had no time to worry about the "gay Christian" button on his seat.

In 1977, I had just been licensed to the ministry in MCC. Troy Perry (founder of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches) was the Honorary Grand Marshal for the parade. He rode in an open convertible at the head of the parade. My daughter Elizabeth (Missy) and I headed the parade. I was Grand Marshal for the parade only because I was the only woman on the Gay Pride Committee, that being the year all the other women had elected to have a separate festival in the park. I represented the only group which had both men and women in it, and had been chosen to lead the parade as the local MCC representative.

I had gone in four years from silence to celebration. Moving from being a lesbian mom school-teacher to becoming a major gay activist in New York was a remarkable journey. I had learned that silence equaled death — if only death of the spirit, and I had moved spiritually from fear to joy in who I was.

Whoever you are, whatever stage in your journey you are at, realize that no one arrives in this world full grown. We all go through stages. People who have done work on gay identity say it takes eight to fourteen years to "come out." We are all in process. May your process and your journey be a healthy one. Happy Gay Pride everyone! ■

Don't miss an issue...

- ☐ I'd like to have the COVENANT TIMES mailed to me monthly.
☐ I'd like to know more about your church. Please send me an information pack.

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DEACON'S

BY DEACON CLIFF TINNEY

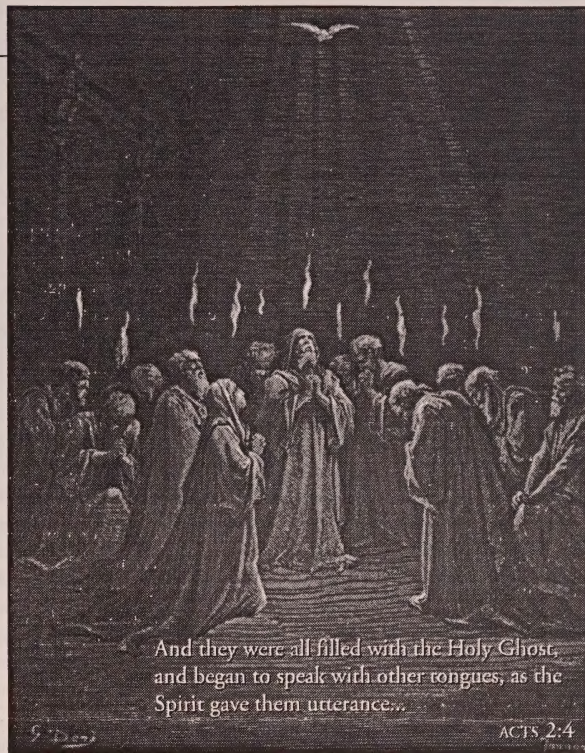
I See Red

This month we will celebrate Pentecost: a celebration of the coming or "pouring out" of The Holy Spirit. The color of Pentecost is the color of fire — red.

The infilling of the Spirit — just what is it? What does it do? How do I receive this wonderful gift that God has given? These are all questions frequently asked.

The Holy Spirit is the presence or power of God among us. It is God alive in our midst. It is present a lot of times even when we don't realize it. The Holy Spirit leads, guides, teaches, and corrects us. The Holy Spirit is the breath or wind of God's word. It is our joy in sorrow, our comfort in pain, and our strength in weakness. It is our song of praise in the midst of trouble. It is our way maker when there isn't a way. It is alive and moving "like a mighty rushing wind" in our midst.

A lot of people associate the gift of Pentecost with loud music, dancing, jumping pews, rolling in the sawdust, or being 'slain in the Spirit'. I can honestly say it is all the above and more. The Holy Spirit will never cause you to be uncomfortable in the way it moves you. As a recovering Pentecostal minister I can personally tell you that the greatest mov-



ing of the spirit is not in the emotionalism but in the deepest, most quiet parts of your soul. One does not have to jump pews or roll on the floor to experience the moving of The Precious Spirit of God. Too many times the manifestation of the spirit has been placed on the external not the internal. The greatest witness that the Spirit is alive in your life is the quiet, heart-changing love that comes from you. It is the power to be a witness.

How do I receive? Simple! Just ask. The Spirit is freely given to all those who ask. Jesus said "Tarry (stay) in Jerusalem until you be endued with power from above." (KJV)

In the coming months we will be incorporating praise songs in the evening worship. Come join in praise to our God with singing, uplifted hands, and open hearts. During this time, if you ask, you too can see red. ■

AGAPE House

continued from page 1

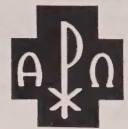
formed by July that will provide personal care, transportation, meal preparation, shopping, and emotional, spiritual and social support. For more information, contact Shirley Lambert at 599-3363.

The Cliff Morrison Memorial Apartment

AGAPE House provides another way to help people living with

AIDS. AGAPE House is a 18 apartment facility for homeless people living with AIDS. CMCC plans to sponsor one of the rooms as a memorial to Pastor Rev. Cliff Morrison. According to longtime board member Dennis Luft, "one of the best ways to memorialize Cliff is by beginning this ministry through hosting a room at AGAPE house. Cliff was lucky to have a

home, others are not." Exactly \$7,500 is needed for the initial funding and 5-year maintenance on the apartment. Sunday, June 4 will be the beginning of a campaign to raise that money. Luft noted, "We also plan to be personally involved with the persons living at AGAPE, providing opportunities for them to interact with people from the church's congregation." ■



LAITY
speak s

BY SHIRLEY LAMBERT

Spring Conference

**Montgomery Alabama
May 5-May 7, 1995
Lay Delegate Report**

District Conference was very spirit filled—even the business meeting. For you newcomers to CMCC, the business meeting follows a strict agenda with reports from each of the district committees and district officers (District Coordinator report, Treasurer's report, etc.) program reports (Commission on Laity, Department of People of Color, Excel, etc.) voting on future Conference sites, and, of course, New Business. Voting is polled by both the Clergy House and the Lay House and all motions must pass in both houses. You might think that it would be impossible to ever get any business accomplished. We set a record, I think—the business meeting was over in 55 minutes. That says a lot about our district, both lay representatives and our clergy, that when we are going about the business of spreading the Good news of Christ's Love; everything else falls into its proper place.

The *Good Business News* is that our District is financially sound, all committees reported progress in their different endeavors, and plans are moving

See **Conference** on page 4

Conference

continued from page 3

along quite well for our Fall 95 (Nov. 17-19) Conference in Asheville, N.C.

New items of business approved were: (1) A resolution to the General Conference regarding the enormous expense of the 1997 General Conference in Australia and its impact on attendance; (2) Election of our pastor, Rev. Marge Ragona, as District Clergy Representative to the Elders Nominating Committee; (3) Nominations for the Board of Elders; (4) Establishment of a Legal Defense Fund (setup with the funds remaining from the New Life MCC's legal battle over their property rights).

Prior to the Business meeting, the Lay House held two Caucuses to discuss the Conference agenda. Lengthy discussions took place on the upcoming changes to the Fellowship's By-Laws to be voted on at General Conference in Atlanta in July. Please plan on attending our local meeting to discuss these changes. Several of the proposed changes will give the District more authority to act. Several of the proposed changes gives the General Council more authority. **THESE PROPOSALS AFFECT EACH OF US.** Steve and I need your input.

A note of pride...

Our Choir's performance was brilliant. The acoustics were terrible, the A/C was not working, and the piano was not in tune. Did not faze them. You could have heard a pin drop in the meeting room during their performance. **THEY WERE AWESOME!!!!**

What a wonderful church to serve; what an honor to represent each of you. ■

MANY VOICES

BY PHILLIP B.

'...let me get my purse'

As you stepped up onto her concrete porch in Eastlake, you always felt a smile coming on. White starched eyelet curtains moved in the breeze, sounds of laughter and music filled that gentle air and the most wonderful smells engulfed your whole presence with that first step. Smells, such as: baking foods taken from "handed down" recipes, of garden flowers that would make *Southern Living* envious and a clean smell that comes only from houses which are "aired out" and scrubbed down with elbow grease and Pine Sol.

Miss Libby, a childless widow for over thirty-five years, died the other day from a prolonged heart condition. Her niece said, "Aunt Libby went to the hospital for tests and just never came out. She was eighty-six and her sweet little heart was just tired, I guess...or, more probably, the good Lord just took Libby on to her reward because he was in need of one of her smiles."

I was fortunate enough to live near Miss Libby for a while and

enjoyed her warmth on several cool autumn days. She was the type of person who could make clowns laugh and little children giggle. She had the power to read a person's eyes and take it to heart.

One Saturday afternoon, as we sat at her small kitchen table, the phone rang. Her neighbor, up the street, was inviting Miss Libby on an "adventure" (or so Miss Libby called it). She turned around in the kitchen and stopped for a moment in front of a sink full of dishes and then turned back toward me. "You know, something," she said, "I bet those dishes will still be here when I get back!" Then she laughed long and clear and went back to the phone, "Do you have time for me to get my purse?"

Life is too short not to make the most of what God gives us. Of course, everyone needs down time. Time to give back to ourselves. But, as with my friend, I believe God travels through people, events, and "adventures". We just have to be ready to hear and ready to feel.

Not too long ago, with the help of a good therapist, and two years of weekly visits, I was able to feel life for the first time. That may be hard for you to understand. It took me quite a while to understand it myself. I had not been living my life. I had been in a state of constant numbness. It was my means of survival. So now I want to feel every moment, sample every taste and experience every situation.

Oh, at least a thousand times, I have felt hurt. I will again. And most times I ask myself, "well, why in the world did you stick yourself out there in the first place?" It's because I don't want to be left sitting at the kitchen table with a sink full of dishes. I want to be up and ready! Ready to experience everything that's out there. Regrettably, that means experiencing my own special set of demons and misfortunes, too. But I have faith. So if the phone rings, I'm ready for an adventure, Miss Libby! Just let me get my purse! ■

Awake and Free

Awake now at fifty-five, childish ways finally die.
What can I possibly say when I see and feel
The gauze of the curtain billowing out:
God's white wing pushed by light and wind
Across the landscape of my resting form.

There I see an Earth bright with clouds and floating hills
Where men and women fill their souls
With honest labor, fill their rooms with fondest love,
Live, embrace their exile with sorrow and joy,
And finally meet the Loved One who takes them home.

We are free, awake, and know it's so.
Rising up reborn and strong in Christlike dream,
we conquer and give our demon world what it cannot take: our love.

John Foust

Happy Father's Day

June 1995

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Every Sunday Sunday School for adults and children 9:30 a.m. Morning Worship 11 a.m. Worship (Tuscaloosa) 4 p.m. Program rehearsal 5:30 p.m. Evening Worship 7 p.m.				Bible Study 7 p.m. 1	2	PRIDE Weekend 3 See Cover Story
PRIDE DAY 4 See Cover Story	5	Choir Practice 6:30 p.m. 6 Council of Ministries Meeting 8 p.m.	Study Course 7 Healing Distorted Images of Self 7 p.m.	Bible Study 7 p.m. 8	9	10
Newsletter Deadline 11	Board Meeting 7 p.m. 12	Choir Practice 6:30 p.m. 13	14	Bible Study 7 p.m. 15	16	17
Building Fund Offering 18 Father's Day	19	Choir Practice 6:30 p.m. 20 Deacon Training 8 p.m.	21	Bible Study 7 p.m. 22	23	24
Community Assistance Fund Offering 25	Deacon/Staff Meeting 8 p.m. 26	Newsletter Production 6 p.m. 27 Choir Practice 6:30 p.m. Deacon Training 8 p.m.	Study Course 7 p.m. 28	Bible Study 7 p.m. 29	30	

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Covenant T I M E S

F E B R U A R Y 1 9 9 5

ANNIVERSARY

CMCC celebrates anniversary with concert and workshops

Covenant Metropolitan Community Church asks, "Where will we be in the year 2000" as the church celebrates its 14th anniversary.

Several events are planned, from Feb. 26 to March 5, to entertain and educate members and the community.

The celebration begins with a concert by David and Jane Syftestad draw from backgrounds in contemporary Christian and traditional gospel music to form their unique sound known for its musical diversity and complexity. A reception follows.

Heid is the music director for St. Johns MCC, Raleigh, N.C. and will serve in the same capacity at the UFMCC General Conference in Atlanta this summer. He was formerly on staff at the renowned Juilliard School.

Syftestad is music director at MCC Los Angeles and has been guest conductor at the World AIDS Day Remembrance Interfaith Service in L.A.

Will Grega's *Gay Music Guide* describes David and Jane saying, "They are jump up on your chair and wave your hands and say 'hallelujah' kind of fun, with first rate originals and stirring covers."

UFMCC founder Rev. Elder Troy Perry says, "Jane and David have a powerful and spirit-led ministry. At the 1991 General Conference, they tore the house down! They are gifted young musicians that bring the love of



God alive through their music."

March 1 marks the Ash Wednesday service. The service begins at 7 p.m.

Beginning at 10 a.m. on Saturday, March 4 special guest Dr. Rembert "Buddy" Truluck, pastor of MCC Nashville, will host a series of workshops on topics like "The Bible as Your Friend," "Sharing Your Faith," and "The Bible and Homosexuality." Truluck will also preach at the Sunday morning service.

Plan to attend.



Sunday, Feb. 25

7 p.m.

Concert by David & Jane

8:30 p.m.

Reception

Wednesday, March 1

7 p.m.

Ash Wednesday Service

Saturday, March 4

10 a.m.

Workshops with

Dr. "Buddy" Truluck

Sunday, March 5

11 a.m.

Truluck preaches at morning service.

*Marge's Musings***Epiphany: A time to share the good news**

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of our God has risen upon you." Isaiah 60:1

Next to Easter, Epiphany is the oldest season of the church year. In the ancient world Epiphany had been celebrated since the second century C.E. It usually begins on Jan. 6, with a celebration both of the birth (with the visit of the Magi) and with the baptism of Jesus. Jan. 6 was chosen because it was the winter solstice, a festival celebrating the birthday of the sun god. In 331 B.C.E. the solstice was moved to Dec. 25, but Jan. 6 continued to be observed. Christians substituted Epiphany for the solstice. The emphasis was on the rebirth of light.

When Dec. 25 was chosen as the birthday of Jesus (and he really may have been born in June), the Greek churches continued to

celebrate Epiphany in terms of the baptism of Jesus, while the Roman churches associated Epiphany with the visit of the Magi. For the East, the baptism was more vital because of the gnostic heresy claiming that only at his baptism did Jesus become the Son of God.

The name Epiphany means "manifestation." The light manifests itself in the darkness, God is revealed in Jesus, and the glory of God is seen in Jesus. Epiphany is a fairly long season this year, lasting until March 1, Ash Wednesday. The ordinary color of Epiphany is green, with white being used to celebrate Epiphany Day, the Baptism of Jesus, and the Transfiguration. Green is the color of growth and during Epiphany we grow into a fuller

realization of the nature of Christ as God's very special gift to humanity.

During Epiphany, we celebrate Christ as the light of the world. Jesus comes into the world as a baby, a frail candle. He becomes the light that enlightens the world. Jesus reveals, shows, manifests God. Throughout Epiphany the light of God's glory is seen increasingly until the Transfiguration, when his clothes and face are as bright as the sun. At the end of Epiphany, we see the light of Christ at its brightest, but Jesus burns himself out on the cross, only to be rekindled at Easter.

Epiphany is one of the most important seasons of the Christian year, because the preaching and teaching done establish the divinity of Christ — the glory of

God manifested in Jesus. It is a time to share your faith with another person, one who does not know God as you do. It is a time to tell someone the good news of your faith, that light has come to a darkened world. For me it is a time to tell the world that the faith of gay Christians is real, and that it brings light to our brothers and sisters who only believe in the condemnation of the world. Jesus says, "I have come, not to condemn the world, but that through me the world might be saved." Reach out, touch someone's life with good news. Share the light you have received with them. Let their lives be brighter; you'll be happier, too, and we will all bask in the light of our savior.

Rev. Marge Ragona

*Deacon's Diary***A Baptism of Christ**

"And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Mark 10:38b

That was the latter half of a question Christ put to James and John when they asked a special favor. They desired to sit one on the right hand and the other on the left: positions when one is seated represent power and closeness.

Such a simple question, yet one which carried the weight of the world: the \$64,000 question. My question has often been "What was the baptism Christ spoke about?" Was it a baptism of rejection, suffering, and death?

Was it a baptism of self denial and self sacrifice? Was it a baptism of love, mercy, and compassion?

In a world full of rejection, suffering and death we certainly do not need their baptism. Frankly, I've had enough of them! As for self denial and sacrifice, well ... enough is enough. So that leaves the last one: a baptism of love, mercy, and compassion.

Jesus said "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's

life for one's friends." (John 15:14). To lay one's life down, not in death but in service; not in suffering but in rejoicing. We as Christians are often too quick to make statements like "I will gladly die for Christ." The saints of old did not become saints only because of their deaths. They became saints because of the life they lived.

Christ is not wanting us to die but live, to give our best to ourselves and to others. God's love and service does not stop because

we mess up. God's love is forever. God's love is unconditional. The Psalmist said "God's mercy endures to all generations." No matter where we are or our frame of mind, Christ's love and mercy is there to hold, protect and lift us up. In a community where hurting, pain, and rejection is the "norm" God's love is a safe tower. This year I ask you my friends to join with me in seeking a new baptism: a baptism of Christ's LOVE.

Deacon Cliff Tinney

CMCC has new goals and a new board

Covenant will face many challenges in 1995 as we move into some new programs, new goals and a new status with the Fellowship. At the congregational meeting, we passed a set of goals and progressive budget that will allow CMCC to attain the status of 'Charter Church' within UFMCC. A couple of the requirements for this include paying our pastor a full-time wage and meeting our monthly budget on a consistent basis.

The regular members and friends of the congregation pledged almost 90 percent of the

monthly budget of \$6,486. An additional \$550 per month was pledged to the building fund. The challenge now is for consistency in meeting the monthly pledge plus bringing a few friends that hopefully will fill in the other 10 percent to reach the budget.

Our average gift per person attending each Sunday last year was \$8.20. If we can increase that giving to \$10 per person per week, the budget is met easily.

Remember that there are envelopes available for cash contributions. Fill in the information so that the pledge amount can be

properly sorted.

We have designated the third Sunday as Building Fund Day. Those that pledged to that fund can give any time but an additional emphasis will be made that day for others to designate their special giving.

Four board members elected

Four board of director vacancies were filled at the Jan. 15 congregational meeting. Long-time board member Dennis Luft was elected to fill the position of clerk, a 2-year term. Mark Moore was elected to the other 2-year term and elected vice-moderator. Carol Cowley and William Berry were each elected to 1-year terms. The four join treasurer Allan Francis and pastor Marge Ragona on the board.



Quilting Bee moves weekly

A group of quilters are meeting each Sunday afternoon at Covenant MCC.

At the first meeting on Jan. 22, a video of the Quilt was shown, panel specifications were dis-

cussed and plans were made for equipment and materials.

There will be a display, dedication and presentation to the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt on June 3.

A quilting bee becomes a com-

munity effort to not only make a memorial to those who have been taken by AIDS, but a healing process for those making the panels. Anyone can make a panel for anyone. The bees are held at 2 p.m. Sundays in the reception hall.

GENERAL CONFERENCE

HOTLANTA

JULY 23 - 30, 1995

General Conference is in Atlanta this year at the Westin Peachtree Plaza. Reservations should be received by June 23. Room prices range from \$78 to \$83) Conference registration is \$180 for non-delegates (\$220 for registration received after March 31). Weekend registration is \$110 in advance, \$135 on-site. See Steve Parker for additional details.

Covenant

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Community Church

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P.O. Box 101473
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Pastor

Rev. Marge Ragona

Student Clergy

John Hankins, Andy Mullins
and Greg Bullard (Huntsville)

Deacons

Cal, Shirley, Kay, Cliff

Newsletter Staff

John Foust, Co-Editor
Mark B. Moore, Art Director

Editor's Note

I am taking a little space to say thanks for all of the help I've had with the newsletter, from organizing, to writing, to folding.

I also want to encourage you to submit to the newsletter. We accept short stories, poetry, editorials, testimonies and more. But if writing is not your forte, we always appreciate help in folding, typing and other tasks. At Covenant there are other committees for which you might find your talents especially suited. Greg Adams is the new chairperson of our SHOE (Social, Hospitality, Outreach and Evangelism) Committee. These are just two places where you might consider helping. Contact Rev. Ragona, Greg Adams, John Foust or Mark Moore if you're ready to help.

February 1995

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			Study Course 1 Healing from Spiritual Abuse 7 p.m.	Bible Study 2 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	3	4
NAMES Project Quilting 5 2 p.m.	Gay Parents Meeting 6	Choir Practice 7 7 p.m.	Study Course 8 Healing from Spiritual Abuse 7 p.m.	Bible Study 9 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	10	11
NAMES Project Quilting 12 2 p.m. Sharing with Friends EXCEL group 5:00 p.m.	Board Meeting 13 7 p.m.	Choir Practice 14 7 p.m. Newsletter deadline	Study Course 15 Healing from Spiritual Abuse 7 p.m.	Bible Study 16 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	17	18
Building Fund Offering 19 NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.	Gay Parents Meeting 20	Choir Practice 21 7 p.m. Deacon Training 8 p.m.	22	Bible Study 23 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	24	25
CAF Offering 26 NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m. Concert 7 p.m.	Deacon and Staff Meeting 27 7 p.m.	Newsletter production 28 6 p.m. Choir Practice 7 p.m. Deacon Training 8 p.m.				

Every Sunday

Sunday School for adults and children 9:30 a.m.
Morning Worship 11 a.m.
Worship (Tuscaloosa) 4 p.m.
Program rehearsal 5:30 p.m.
Evening Worship 7 p.m.

Readings for this month

February 5

5th Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 6: 1-13

I Corinthians 15: 1-11

Luke 5: 1-11

February 12

6th Sunday after Epiphany

Jeremiah 17: 5-10

I Corinthians 15: 12-20

Luke 6: 17-26

February 19

7th Sunday after Epiphany

Genesis 45: 3-11, 15

I Corinthians 15: 35-38, 42-50

Luke 6: 27-38

February 26

8th Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 55: 10-13

I Corinthians 15: 51-58

Luke 6: 39-49

What is Excel?

A question perhaps many of you may have asked lately. We have been announcing from the pulpit and in the bulletin the last couple of months about the Excel retreat coming up on March 31, April 1, and April 2. The following is an explanation of what Excel is.

In 1949, a Roman Catholic priest and a team of lay people founded "Cursillo," an exercise in lay renewal. Since then the Cursillo movement has spread around the world.

Hundreds of thousands of people have experienced a deepening

of their faith and involvement in the life of the church through Cursillo. The Methodists have a similar program called, "The Walk To Emmaus" and the Presbyterians, "Living Waters."

In 1975, Rev. Richard Mickley adapted Cursillo as a one-time special retreat for UFMCC's Los Angeles Congregation. That first weekend was so popular that the group continued the weekends. Soon people throughout UFMCC heard about Excel and traveled to Los Angeles to attend the exercise.

During 1980, "Excel in the Redwoods," in the San Francisco Bay area, formed and conducted their first weekend with the assistance of the "Excel in the City of The Angels" team, from Los Angeles. This marked the beginning of the growth of the Excel movement. Also

formed that year was "Excel in the Desert," Phoenix, Arizona. The word had spread that this program of lay education and renewal was not only needed but would make a positive contribution to the life of local congregations. The history of Cursillo in the early 1950s was repeated in Excel in the early 1980s.

There are many Excel teams all over the United States, and in at least five different countries. The Excel movement is continuing to grow.

Excel is an exciting weekend of renewal and spiritual growth. It is an exercise in Christian community living held in a setting that provides participants with a message and a method for balancing their personal spiritual life and an active Christian life within their home church.

The Gulf Lower Atlantic District's team was formed after "Excel of the Suitcase," an Excel team consisting of members from teams from all the country, put on a weekend for our district about three years ago. After two years of training, the "Excel of the Rainbow Zebra" was formed. The weekend coming up at the end of March is our third weekend. The team is made up of people who have been participants at an Excel weekend, helped as a friend at an Excel weekend, and have been through extensive team training. The Excel of the Rainbow Zebra team is made up of people from Atlanta, Birmingham, Boone, N.C., Charleston, S.C., and Gastonia, N.C.

The Excel of the Rainbow

Zebra weekends will always be held within our district which includes: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. The team tries to keep the weekends as centrally located as possible, depending on availability of sites, so everyone will have an opportunity to attend. The March 31 through April 2 weekend will be held near Toccoa, Ga. The site is at the very base of the Appalachian Mountains.

The weekend begins on Friday evening and ends on Sunday afternoon. All events during the weekend build upon each other, so participants must plan to attend the entire weekend.

There are registration forms in the foyer of the church, or you can call 956-6418 to request a form, or more information. We can only accept a certain number of participants for each weekend, so sign up as soon as possible. Remember, this weekend is open to our entire district.

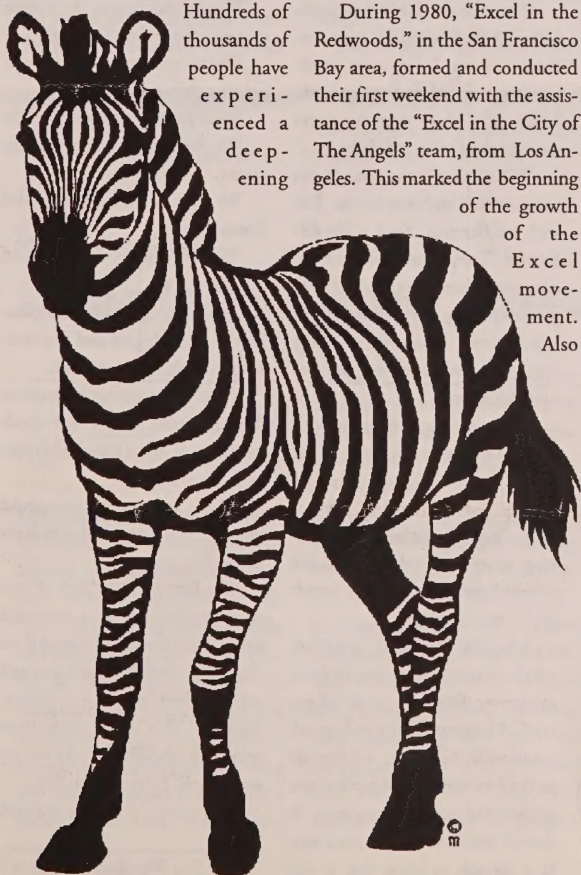
We have a lot of Excel graduates at CMCC. You will know them by the rainbow stoles they are wearing. Attending a weekend will let you know where our name, Excel of the Rainbow Zebra, comes from.

The word Excel comes from 1st Corinthians 12:31, "And I will show you a still more EXCELLENT way."

We hope to see you there!

Your Excel of the Rainbow Zebra team members from Birmingham,

Shirley, Kay and Cal



*Perspectives***What Psalm 22 means today**

My life has been full of new beginnings. That is why during the days of Advent before Christmas, I was filled with feelings of hope and renewal. I think many of us were. Sunday after Sunday the candles of the Advent wreath were lit until finally the Christ candle was lit.

For me it was an explosion of joy. Joy returned to me during Christmas. The dark shadow and grief of my lover's death three years ago just before Christmas had healed.

What does this healing mean? For me it means that I am no longer encumbered by personal grief and that I have been healed into a new body which I put on during the celebration of Jesus's birthday.

Now, however, the celebrations are over. Mary and Joseph have fled to Egypt. The Magi have gone home. The shepherds have returned to their everyday duties. The star of wonder is eclipsed as the horizon of the world looms ever larger.

With our healed bodies and minds we return again to the old, turning world. And we find that its news is full of repetitive, depressing stuff. The news saddens us. The world's stories are a big let down from the joy of Christmas.

For me the big let down occurred this week during a business trip. My new healed body and mind was buffeted with despair as I watched the news on CNN where the inflow of the world and its doings is continuous.

First, there was the ceaseless gossip and rumor surrounding the O.J. Simpson case. Why, I asked myself, was there so much morbid curiosity about misfortune? Why

had it happened anyway?

Then came Bosnia. The weary reports of continuing slaughter and fighting. How, even when truces are declared, can murder continue? Truces are made to be broken, I thought. Its so predictable. Will killing and war always continue in this weary world?

There were reports on TV. Research reveals new strains that are resistant to all our drugs. The new TV is a story of how a disease, once nearly eradicated, is storming back in spite of all that modern science can throw at it. Is there no end to the viruses that the world throws at us? How frustrating to optimistic science, that for every two strides forward, the winds of the world push us back one.

It went on like this. Story after story. All were depressing and filled with mockery. Finally I had enough of this self whipping. I turned the TV off. I thought of reading an escapist novel. That had worked in the past as a way to relieve pain and anxiety. But it didn't work this time. The author's words, which once had seemed so clever and entertaining, were stale and predictable. I mean, what did I care about the homo-erotic concerns of nineteenth century vampires. I closed the book with a snap. It was not enough.

I had not brought my Bible but I felt like I needed to read it. So I picked up the Gideon bible from the night stand beside my bed. I was going to let it open up anywhere and start reading. I opened up the front cover. Neatly placed in the center of the cover page was a label inscribed with a skull and crossbones. Written beneath the emblem were the words, "Warn-

ing, the words inside are not true and are hazardous to your health." "Cute," I thought. "Real cute."

Now I don't know anything about the Gideons, but I was certain they had not put the skull and crossbones label in the front their Bible. Not thinking, intuitively, in an act of anger, I tore the label from the book. I felt that the label was just another intrusion from the world... in fact, at that moment, I felt that the placing of the label in the book was an act of Satan. It was a temptation placed before me to read no further.

Now that the Bible was clean, I allowed the Bible to fall open randomly. My eyes fell upon the words which you heard read earlier from Psalm 22: "Many dogs surround me, a pack of evildoers closes in..."

"What's this?" I thought. It was another skull and crossbones. But with a difference. Such a big difference. These words were part of a lament written long ago and were probably sung in the first temple in Jerusalem. An ancient poet cries out against the world's evil and sorrow. It's a prayer.

The poet's prayer rings out with truth in our world as well. Why? It is obvious. Evil never changes and is always with us.

As I read the psalm from beginning to end several times, I saw clearly how the psalmist's words apply to us today.

It begins, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me, far from my prayer, from the words of my cry?" The poet's first words speak emotionally, humanly, and directly to God in response to some event unrecorded and long forgotten. It doesn't matter what the event was. It is enough to know that it was

something deeply disturbing to the poet and to the tribes worshipping at the temple as well.

Today these words are still disturbing and full of power. Are they not?

They are still inspired by the breath of God. Are they not?

They still strike chords of fear in us. And well they should.

Jesus Christ cried them out on the Cross as He suffered. He cried them out because he was fully human and felt human pain. And we gay Christians today, cry out as well. Do we not?

We cry out against the plague that eats the ranks of our tribe.

We cry out against the delay in fighting this plague.

We cry out against early death.

We mourn the athlete dying young.

We mourn the historian John Boswell.

We rail against the death of friends.

We cry out against the Religious Reich: those bigots and Pharisees who rub salt in our wounds.

We cry out against hypocrites: those political snakes that speak sweet words in the temples but bite us in the dark.

We rail against those that would impose their perverted standards upon us.

The list is long. Each of you could expand the list a thousand times. And it would be good if we did. The crying out of hurts and pain is a cleansing thing... a prayerful thing. That is why the psalmist cried out, and that it why we cry out as well, every day we live.

And what else did the psalmist

Psalm

continued from page 6

say to me that evening in my motel room: "I am like water poured out; all my bones are racked. My heart has become like wax melting away within my bosom."

The psalmist says, "I am full of fear." He prays about the human condition called fear. The poet feels he has been drained of life, that he is numb with torture, that his once brave heart melts under oppression.

I felt the power of these words instantly when I read them. Not only are these words a description of the human fear Christ felt on the Cross, they are also a description of the fear gay people have in this world that "surrounds them like dogs." The dogs have the fangs to attack, to rend our flesh, and to crucify. We know the dogs of fear. I fear every one!*

I fear Nazi and skin-head thugs.

I fear charlatan preachers preaching hate to innocent children.

I fear clever talk show hosts who feast on guile.

I fear fat scientists who gorge themselves on money never intending to find a cure.

I fear that my rights as a human being, my freedoms will be taken away.

I fear whispering behind my back.

I fear confrontation.

I fear gays who pander to those who scorn us.

I fear what a simple kiss may bring.

I fear change even though I may be bound in chains.

Think about your fears. They surround you like a pack of dogs. Confront them, one by one.

Quit your smiling. Yes, you. You are the one I'm talking about.

Offer each snarling cur up to God. Do not hide them. Do not pretend they are not there. Show them to God. Say, "God, I am afraid." For if you do not, they will multiply and grow even stronger.

Like the psalmist says, "Rescue my soul from the sword, my loneliness from the grip of the dog."

But there is an up side to this. When we have born all these griefs and fears up to God, and pleaded for rescue, we are lifted up. And like the poet we can sing, "So by your gift will I utter praise in the vast assembly; I will fulfill my vows before those who fear God."

This phrase is like the last lines in a sweeping epic. All the tribes are called in to stand before the high king. All personal foes have

been conquered, and those others... those dogs whining from the distance... are kept at bay.

I closed the Bible. I felt lifted up. I felt that dull depression had given way to high hope. I knew we must remain vigilant for our children, that we must continue to bring our tribe home, help heal and make them strong. I felt that our time in the wilderness was nearly over, and that God was about to lift us up to our own promised land.

I think the following verses will always remain in my mind, and that they prophesy the future of our gay tribe:

"Let the coming generation be told of the Lord that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born, the justice God has shown."

John Foust

*Perspectives***Love's longing answered by God**

Everyone longs to give themselves completely to someone...to have a deep soul relationship with another...to be loved thoroughly and exclusively. But God, to a Christian, says, "No, not until you are satisfied, fulfilled and content with being loved by Me alone...with giving yourself totally and unreservedly to me...to having an intensely personal and unique relationship with me alone, discovering that only in me is your satisfaction to be found will you be capable of the perfect human relationship that I have

planned for you. You will never be united with another until you are united with me...exclusive of anyone or anything else, exclusive of any other desires or longings.

I want you to stop planning, stop wishing, and allow me to give you the most thrilling plan existing...one that you cannot imagine. I want you to have the best. Please allow me to bring it to you. You must keep watching me, expecting the greatest things...keep experiencing the satisfaction that I am. Keep listening and learning the things I

tell you. You must wait, that's all. Don't be anxious. Don't look around at the things others have gotten or that I have given. Don't worry. Don't look at the things you want. You must keep looking off and away up to me, or you'll miss what I want to show you. And then when you're ready, I'll surprise you with a love more wonderful than any you would dream of.

You see, until you are ready (I am working even this moment to have both of you ready at the same time.), until you are both satisfied exclusively with me and

the life I prepared for you, you won't be able to experience the love that exemplifies your relationship with me, and thus the perfect love. And dear one, I want you to have this most wonderful love. I want you to see in the flesh a picture of your relationship with me, and to enjoy materially and concretely the everlasting union of beauty, perfection, and love that I offer you with myself. Know that I love you utterly. I am the God, Almighty. Believe it and be satisfied.

An anonymous piece submitted by Eddie Merrell

P.O. Box 101473
Birmingham, AL 35210

Forward and Address Correction

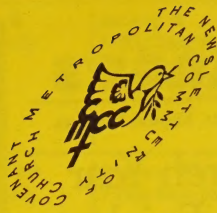
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Alvin duck Wilson
has had his sex changed
and his name changed
and has moved to
Decatur, Alab.

~~Alvin D. Wilson
1916 16th Ave. S. Apt. 1
Birmingham, AL 35205~~

Alan

PLEASE send this to
Paula Miller the old Alvin
216 6th Ave., S.W.
decatur, alab
35601



C O V E N A N T Times

J A N U A R Y 1 9 9 6

Congregational Meeting

New Board to be elected at January meeting

✠ BY MARK B. MOORE

The time is drawing closer. As we move into the new year, we at Covenant are planning for big things...bigger than building purchases, bigger than weekend celebrations. We plan to continue a tradition of ministry—spreading the knowledge and joy we know through Jesus. Sound simple? Well that is a calling of a church. But a church is also an organizations with secular responsibilities. That's why we have a board and committees and meetings.

Our annual Congregational Meeting is Sunday, Jan. 14 following morning worship and a potluck. Plan to attend. Every voice is needed.

We also need people to step up and take charge or help out in various areas of the church. It's all been said before, and remains true.

At this meeting we will elect a new board, as four of the five positions come open. They include one 1-year slot, and three 2-year slots. Any of our current board can run

for election, but it is also time for some of you, to question and pray about where God will have you serve.

The board's main duty is governing the financial and physical affairs of the church. From working with the board I have concluded asking questions is as important as answering them. Members must be dedicated and attentive.

But serving on the board isn't for everyone. Like any growing church, we have committees coming out of the woodwork. Our Council of Ministries handles areas like Christian education, evangelism and public relations. As people come and go, vacancies occur. You may have just what it takes to help on or head up a committee on the Council.

Please give these things prayerful consideration in the weeks ahead and then make your voice heard in the form of a letter of intent to run for the board or as a vote during the congregational meeting.

Get ready for Troy and much more! February How close we are! Following marks our congregation's 15th anniversary negotiating, campaigning and and to celebrate we will host a weekend of praying we own the building. activities including entertainment, a banquet, Almost. The only remaining detail the chance to hear our denominations founder, will be a vote at the Jan. 14 a breakfast and more. Rev. Elder Troy Perry in Congregational Meeting to approve addition to being an author, speaker, and the specifics of the purchase as preacher, is one of the gay community's needed by the loaning institution. political advocates. He is both insightful and But that won't hinder us. We entertaining. Plus that weekend classically received many monetary gifts of trained singer, Carolyn Marshall will perform varying sizes, as well as items a Friday night concert. The activities take place purchased from the Wedding Feb. 16-18, but the anniversary celebration Chapel and donated by members of won't end then. It will kick off a year-long the congregation. The Building will ministry "Forging New Alliances," as we not be dedicated Feb. 18 as part of our only open our doors to the community, but go 15th Anniversary Celebration. out into the community as well.

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Clergy In Formation
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Richard Barham,
John Foust,
Dr. Lee Rahe

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MARGE'S

BY REV. MARGE RAGONA

Church Year 101: Epiphany

As we enter January, following the excitement of Christmas and the beginning of the new year, there doesn't seem to be much to celebrate. In our civic year, all is quiet until the commemoration of the birthday of Martin Luther King. But in the church, a great deal is going on, even though it is going on rather quietly. On Jan. 6, we enter the season of Epiphany, one of the oldest seasons of the church year.

Epiphany means "manifestation." To the ordinary person who spoke Greek in the ancient world epiphaneia was used in two ways. First, it was used of the appearance of a god to the worshippers. Secondly, it was used of the accession of an emperor to the imperial power of Rome. It tells us of God's appearance to us in Jesus, and of Christ's accession to the throne of our hearts. Epiphany was probably the third chief event, after Easter and Pentecost, in the calendar of the early church. It may have begun in Egypt as early as the second century.

In Christian use, Epiphany signified several things, all which had to do with Christ's work of manifesting God with us. Originally, this festival season celebrated the birth of Christ, the visit of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus, and the first miracles of Jesus. It predated Christmas as the birth of Christ. The first mention of a new holiday, Christmas, observed on Dec. 25, was recorded in 354 CE, although there is some evidence that that date may have been observed in Africa as early as 312 CE and in Rome about 336. Epiphany, in many parts of the world, is the day on which



THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these

MATTHEW 6: 28,29

gifts are given in remembrance of the gifts the wise men brought to the infant Jesus, and in western Christianity is celebrated on Jan. 6. Eastern Christianity celebrates that date as the baptism of Jesus. The common theme throughout Epiphany is Jesus manifesting God to us humans. The wise men stood for the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ to the gentiles (the non-Jews).

As a Jewish boy, Jesus would have been circumcised on the eighth day of life and Luke tells us, "Eight days later the time came to circumcise him, and he was given the name Jesus." (Luke 2:21). Jan. 1 became known as the Feast of the Circumcision or the Holy Name of Jesus. Forty days after the birth of a son, his mother would have purified herself, and so Luke 2:22-40 gives the

story of the Presentation in the Temple, usually Feb. 2. Epiphany goes on to celebrate Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, his first miracle at Cana and the feeding of the 5,000 — each accompanied by a manifestation of God among the people. Epiphany ends with the Transfiguration of Jesus, accompanied by the appearance of Moses and Elijah, with a voice from heaven announcing, "this is my Son, my beloved."

Epiphany gives us an opportunity to know more about the very early ministry of Jesus, and this year allows us to look at the Sermon on the Mount in detail since Ash Wednesday does not come until Feb. 21.

Epiphany — manifestation of God in Jesus Christ — come, let us learn more about God's glory and Christ's place in our lives.

	January 1 New Year's Day	January 2 6:30p Choir 8:00p Council of Ministries	January 3 7:00p Study Series	January 4 7:00p Bible Study	January 5	January 6 10:00a Work Day at the church
January 7 9:30a Inquirer Class	January 8 7:00p Board Meeting	January 9 6:30p Choir 8:00p Sharing of Friends (EXCEL)	January 10 7:00p Study Series	January 11 7:00p Bible Study	January 12	January 13
January 14 1:00p Congrega- tional meeting follows 11 a.m. worship.	January 15 Martin Luther King, Jr. 7:00p Church History Class	January 16 6:30p Choir 8:00p Deacon Training	January 17 7:00p Study Series	January 18 7:00p Bible Study	January 19	January 20
January 21 9:30a Inquirer Class	January 22 7:00p Church History Class	January 23 6:30p Choir 8:00p Deacon Training	January 24 7:00p Study Series	January 25 7:00p Bible Study	January 26	January 27
January 28 9:30a Inquirer Class	January 29	January 30 6:30p Choir	January 31 7:00p Study Series			

DEACON'S diary

BY DEACON CAL McCLOSKEY

Suggestions on prayer...

When I was thinking about writing an article for the newsletter, I was not sure what to write about. Then one day a friend mentioned to me that when we consecrate communion we do not always remind the congregation that we have prayer warriors available for intercessory prayer.

In my reading I found an article from a book called *Illustrations Unlimited*. It is a collection of stories quotation and humor for speaker, writes, pastors, and teachers.

I would like to share a small essay from this book, "A Method of Praying" written by Walter Rauschenbusch which I believe bears on the subject of intercessory prayer.

Be simple and direct in your secret prayer. The grace of simplicity is not to be despised in public prayer; but when we call

on God in secret, any formality or elaborateness in our petitions is an offense.

Pray audibly. You need not lift your voice to be heard in the street, but it is vastly better to pray not merely in your thoughts but also with words. The utterance of our wants helps to define them.

Be honest in your secret prayer. Do not express any want that you do not feel. Do not confess any fault that you do not mean to forsake. Do not keep anything back. Remember that it is God that searches the heart.

Pray earnestly. The words need not be loud, but the desire should be intense. "The fervent, energetic prayer of the righteous person availeth much." "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." No listless, drowsy peti-

tioning will serve.

Do not mock God in your prayers. Do not beg God to come to you. You know that God is never far from any soul that seeks. That prayer is answered before you speak it. Do not as God to do for you that which God has already asked you to do.

Pray always with special reference to the needs of the day and the hour: the warfare to be waged, the temptations to be resisted, the work to be done, the sorrow to be borne. Put your life into your prayer and let it be the most real and the most immediate business of your life.

How does this small essay relate to intercessory prayer. Each Sunday we have one or two people that stand below the altar for intercessory prayer. If you feel the need for someone to speak for

you earnestly to God, someone is there for you. The good intercessor practices what Rauschenbusch recommends and carries you along in prayer. The intercessor's prayer is your prayer.

I would also like to share at this point the idea of a child with reference to Divine Intercession. An elderly gentleman passed his granddaughter's room one night and overheard her repeating the alphabet in an oddly reverent way.

He asked her "What on Earth are you up to?"

"I'm saying my prayers, but I can't think of exactly the right words tonight, so I'm just saying all the letters. God will put them together for me because God knows what I'm thinking."

My prayer for all of you is that you have a wonderful Spirit-filled New Year.

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Covenant T I M E S

F E B R U A R Y 1 9 9 5

ANNIVERSARY

CMCC celebrates anniversary with concert and workshops

Covenant Metropolitan Community Church asks, "Where will we be in the year 2000" as the church celebrates its 14th anniversary.

Several events are planned, from Feb. 26 to March 5, to entertain and educate members and the community.

The celebration begins with a concert by David and Jane Sunday, Feb. 25 at 7 p.m. David Heid and Jane Syftestad draw from backgrounds in contemporary Christian and traditional gospel music to form their unique sound known for its musical diversity and complexity. A reception follows.

Heid is the music director for MCCC New York and will serve in the same capacity at the UFMCC General Conference in Atlanta this summer. He was formerly on staff at the renowned Juilliard School.

Syftestad is music director at MCCC Los Angeles and has been guest conductor at the World AIDS Day Remembrance Interfaith Service in L.A.

Will Grega's *Gay Music Guide* describes the David and Jane saying, "They are jump up on your chair and wave your hands and say 'hallelujah' kind of fun, with first rate originals and stirring covers."

UFMCC founder Rev. Elder Troy Perry says, "Jane and David have a powerful and spirit-led ministry. At the 1991 General Conference, they tore the house down! They are gifted young musicians that bring the love of



God alive through their music."

March 1 marks the Ash Wednesday service. The service begins at 7 p.m.

Beginning at 10 a.m. on Saturday, March 4 special guest Dr. Rembert "Buddy" Truluck, pastor of MCC Nashville will host a series of workshops on topics like "The Bible as Your Friend," "Sharing Your Faith," and "The Bible and Homosexuality." Truluck will also preach at the Sunday morning service.

Plan to attend.



Sunday, Feb. 25

7 p.m.
Concert by David & Jane
8:30 p.m.
Reception

Wednesday, March 1

7 p.m.
Ash Wednesday Service

Saturday, March 4

10 a.m.
Workshops with Dr. "Buddy" Truluck

Sunday, March 5

11 a.m.
Truluck preaches at morning service.

Marge's Musings headline

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of our God has risen upon you." Isaiah 60:1

Next to Easter, Epiphany is the oldest season of the church year. In the ancient world Epiphany had been celebrated since the second century C.E. It usually begins on January 6th, with a celebration both of the birth (with the visit of the Magi) and with the baptism of Jesus. January 6th was chosen because it was the winter solstice, a festival celebrating the birthday of the sun god. In 331 B.C.E. the solstice was moved to December 25, but January 6th continued to be observed. Christians substituted Epiphany for the solstice. The emphasis was on the rebirth of light.

When December 25 was chosen as the birthday of Jesus (and he really may have been born in

June), the Greek churches continued to celebrate Epiphany in terms of the baptism of Jesus, while the Roman churches associated Epiphany with the visit of the Magi. For the East, the baptism was more vital because of the Gnostic heresy claiming that only at his baptism did Jesus become the Son of God.

The name Epiphany means "manifestation." The light manifests itself in the darkness, God is revealed in Jesus, and the glory of God is seen in Jesus. Epiphany is a fairly long season this year, lasting until March 1, Ash Wednesday. The ordinary color of Epiphany is green, with white being used to celebrate Epiphany Day, the Baptism of Jesus, and the Transfiguration. Green is the color of growth and during

Epiphany we grow into a fuller realization of the nature of Christ as God's very special gift to humanity.

During Epiphany, we celebrate that Christ is the light of the world. Jesus comes into the world as a baby, a frail candle. He becomes the light that enlightens the world. Jesus reveals, shows, manifests God. Throughout Epiphany the light of God's glory is seen increasingly until the Transfiguration, when his clothes and face are as bright as the sun. At the end of Epiphany, we see the light of Christ at its brightest, but Jesus burns himself out on the cross, only to be rekindled at Easter.

Epiphany is one of the most important seasons of the Christian year, because the preaching and teaching done establish the

divinity of Christ — the glory of God manifested in Jesus. It is a time to share your faith with another person, one who does not know God as you do. It is a time to tell someone the good news of your faith, that light has come to a darkened world. For me it is a time to tell the world that the faith of gay Christians is real, and that it brings light to our brothers and sisters who only believe in the condemnation of the world. Jesus says, "I have come, not to condemn the world, but that through me the world might be saved." Reach out, touch someone's life with good news. Share the light you have received with them. Let their lives be brighter; you'll be happier, too, and we will all bask in the light of our savior.

*Pastor Marge Ragona
Rev.*

Deacon's Diary

A Baptism of Christ

"And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Mark 10:38b

This is the latter half of a question Christ put to James and John when they asked a special favor. They desired to sit one on the right hand and the other on the left; positions when one is seated, that represents power and closeness.

Such a simple question, yet one which carried the weight of the world: the \$64,000 question. My question has often been "What was the baptism Christ spoke about?" Was it a baptism of rejection, suffering, and death?

Was it a baptism of self denial and self sacrifice? Was it a baptism of love, mercy, and compassion?

In a world full of rejection, suffering and death we certainly do not need their baptism. Frankly, I've had enough of them! As for self denial and sacrifice, well ... enough is enough. So that leaves the last one: a baptism of love, mercy, and compassion.

Jesus said "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's

life for one's friends." (John 15:14). To lay one's life down, not in death but in service, not in suffering but in rejoicing. We as Christians are often too quick to make statements like "I will gladly die for Christ." The saints of old did not become saints only because of their deaths. They became saints because of the life they lived.

Christ is not wanting us to die but live, to give our best to ourselves and to others. God's love and service does not stop because

we mess up. God's love is forever. God's love is unconditional. The Psalmist said "God's mercy endures to all generations." No matter where we are or our frame of mind, Christ's love and mercy is there to hold, protect and lift us up. In a community where hurting, pain, and rejection is the "norm" God's love is a safe tower. This year I ask you my friends to join with me in seeking a new baptism: a baptism of Christ's LOVE.

Deacon Cliff Tinney

CMCC has new goals and a new board

Covenant will face many challenges in 1995 as we move into some new programs, new goals and a new status with the Fellowship. At the congregational meeting, we passed a set of goals and progressive budget that will allow CMCC to attain the status of 'Charter Church' within UFMCC. A couple of the requirements for this include paying our pastor a full-time wage and meeting our monthly budget on a consistent basis.

The regular members and friends of the congregation pledged almost ninety percent of

the monthly budget of \$6,486. An additional \$550 per month was pledged to the building fund. The challenge now is for consistency in meeting

the monthly pledge plus bringing a few friends that hopefully will fill in the other 10 percent to reach the budget.

Our average gift per person attending each Sunday last year was \$8.20. If we can increase that giving

to \$10 per person per week, the budget is met easily.

Remember that there are envelopes available for cash contributions. Fill in the information so that the pledge amount can be

properly sorted.

We have designated the third Sunday as Building Fund Day. Those that pledged to that fund can give any time but an additional emphasis will be made that day for others to designate their special giving.

Four board members elected

Four board of director vacancies were filled at the Jan. 15 congregational meeting. long-time board member Dennis Luft was elected to fill the position of clerk, a 2-year term. Mark Moore was elected to the other 2-year term and elected vice-moderator. Carol Cowley and William Berry were each elected to 1-year terms. The four join treasurer Allan Francis and pastor Marge Ragona on the board.



Quilting Bee moves weekly

A group of quilters are meeting each Sunday afternoon at Covenant MCC.

At the first meeting on Jan. 22, a video of the Quilt was shown, panel specifications were dis-

cussed and plans were made for equipment and materials.

There will be a display, dedication and presentation to the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt on June 3.

A quilting bee becomes a com-

munity effort to not only make a memorial to those who have been taken by AIDS, but a healing process for those making the panels. Anyone can make a panel for anyone. The bee's are held at 2 p.m. Sundays in the reception hall.

Covenant
TIMES

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Pastor

Rev. Marge Ragona

Student Clergy

John Hankins, Andy Mullins
and Greg Bullard (Huntsville)

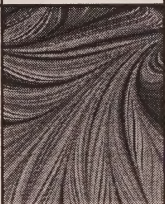
Deacons

Cal, Shirley, Kay, Cliff

Newsletter Staff

John Foust, Co-Editor
Mark B. Moore, Art Director

February 1995

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			Study Course 1 Healing from Spiritual Abuse 7 p.m.	Bible Study 2 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	3	4
NAMES Project Quilting 5 2 p.m.	Gay Parents Meeting 6	Choir Practice 7 7 p.m.	Study Course 8 Healing from Spiritual Abuse 7 p.m.	Bible Study 9 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	10	11
NAMES Project Quilting 12 2 p.m.	Board Meeting 13 7 p.m.	Choir Practice 14 7 p.m.	Study Course 15 Healing from Spiritual Abuse 7 p.m.	Bible Study 16 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	17	18
Sharing with Friends EXCEL group 5:00 p.m.		Newsletter deadline				
Building Fund Offering 19	Gay Parents Meeting 20	Choir Practice 21 7 p.m.	22	Bible Study 23 Gospel of Luke 7 p.m.	24	25
NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.		Deacon Training 8 p.m.				
CAF Offering 26	Deacon and Staff Meeting 27 7 p.m.	Newsletter production 28 6 p.m.				
NAMES Project Quilting 2 p.m.		Choir Practice 7 p.m.				
Concert 7 p.m.		Deacon Training 8 p.m.	Every Sunday Sunday School for adults and children 9:30 a.m. Morning Worship 11 a.m. Worship (Tuscaloosa) 4 p.m. Program rehearsal 5:30 p.m. Evening Worship 7 p.m.			

Readings for this month

2/5 - 7th Sunday after Epiphany: Isaiah 6: 1-13, 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11, Luke 5: 1-11
 2/12 - Sixth " " : Jeremiah 17: 5-10, 1 Cor. 15: 12-20, Luke 6: 17-26
 2/19 - Seventh " " : Genesis 45: 3-11, 15; 1 Cor. 15: 35-38, 42-50; Luke 6: 27-38
 2/26 - Eighth " " : Isaiah 55: 10-13, 1 Cor. 15: 51-58, Luke 6: 39-49

What is EXCEL?

A question perhaps many of you may have asked lately. We have been announcing from the pulpit and in the bulletin the last couple of months about the Excel retreat coming up on March 31, April 1, and April 2nd. The following is an explanation of what Excel is.

In 1949, a Roman Catholic priest and a team of lay people founded "Cursillo," an exercise in lay renewal. Since then the Cursillo movement has spread around the world. Hundreds of thousands of people have experienced a deepening of their faith and involvement in the life of the church through Cursillo. The Methodists have a similar program called, "The Walk To Emmaus" and the Presbyterians, "Living Waters."

In 1975, Rev. Richard Vickley adapted Cursillo as a one time special retreat for UFMCC's Los Angeles Congregation. That first weekend was so popular that the group continued the weekends. Soon people throughout UFMCC heard about Excel and traveled to Los Angeles to attend the exercise.

During 1980, "Excel in the Redwoods," in the San Francisco Bay area, formed and conducted their first weekend with the assistance of the "Excel in the City of The Angels" team, from Los Angeles. This marked the beginning of the growth of the Excel movement. Also formed that year was "Excel in the Desert," Phoenix, Arizona. The word had spread that this program of lay education and renewal was not only needed but would make a positive contribution to the life of local congregations. The history of Cursillo in the early 1950s was repeated in Excel in the early 1980s.

There are many Excel teams all over the United States, and in at least five different countries. The Excel movement is continuing to grow.

Excel is an exciting weekend of renewal and spiritual growth. It is an exercise in Christian community living held in a setting that provides participants with a message and a method for balancing their personal spiritual life and an active Christian life within their home church.

The Gulf Lower Atlantic

District's team was formed after "Excel of the Suitcase," an Excel team consisting of members from teams from all the country, put on a weekend for our district about three years ago. After two years of training, the "Excel of the Rainbow Zebra" was formed. The weekend coming up at the end of March is our third weekend. The team is made up of people who have been participants at an Excel weekend, helped as a friend at an Excel weekend, and has been through extensive team training. The Excel of the Rainbow Zebra team is made up of people from Atlanta, Ga., Birmingham, Ala., Boone, N.C., Charleston, S.C., and Gastonia, N.C.

The Excel of the Rainbow Zebra weekends will always be held within our district which includes: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. The team tries to keep the weekends as centrally located as possible, depending on availability of sites, so everyone will have an opportunity to attend. The March 31 through April 2 weekend will be held near

Toccoa, Ga. The site is at the very base of the Appalachian Mountains.

The weekend begins on Friday evening and ends on Sunday afternoon. All events during the weekend build upon each other, so participants must plan to attend the entire weekend.

There are registration forms in the foyer of the church, or you can call 956-6418 to request a form, or more information. We can only accept a certain number of participants for each weekend, so sign up as soon as possible. Remember, this weekend is open to our entire district.

We have a lot of Excel graduates at CMCC. You will know them by the rainbow stoles they are wearing. Attending a weekend will let you know where our name, Excel of the Rainbow Zebra, comes from.

The word Excel comes from 1st Corinthians 12:31, "And I will show you a still more EXCELlent way."

We hope to see you there!

Your Excel of the Rainbow Zebra team members from Birmingham,

Shirley, Kay and Cal

Perspectives

What Psalm 22 means today

My life has been full of new beginnings. That is why during the days of Advent before Christmas, I was filled with feelings of hope and renewal. I think many of us were. Sunday after Sunday the candles of the Advent wreath were lit until finally the Christ candle was lit.

For me it was an explosion of joy. Joy returned to me during Christmas. The dark shadow and grief of my lover's death three years ago just before Christmas had healed.

What does this healing mean? For me it means that I am no longer encumbered by personal grief and that I have been healed into a new body which I put on during the celebration of Jesus's birthday.

Now, however, the celebrations are over. Mary and Joseph have fled to Egypt. The Magi have gone home. The shepherds have returned to their everyday duties. The star of wonder is eclipsed as the horizon of the world looms ever larger.

With our healed bodies and minds we return again to the old, turning world. And we find that its news is full of repetitive, depressing stuff. The news saddens us. The world's stories are a big let down from the joy of Christmas.

For me the big let down occurred this week during a business trip. My new healed body and mind was buffeted with despair as I watched the news on CNN where the inflow of the world and its doings is continuous.

First, there was the ceaseless gossip and rumor surrounding the O.J. Simpson case. Why, I asked myself, was there so much morbid curiosity about misfortune? Why had it happened anyway?

Then came Bosnia. The weary reports of continuing slaughter and

fighting. How, even when truces are declared, can murder continue? Truces are made to be broken, I thought. Its so predictable. Will killing and war always continue in this weary world?

There were reports on TB. Research reveals new strains that are resistant to all our drugs. The new TB is a story of how a disease, once nearly eradicated, is storming back in spite of all that modern science can throw at it. Is there no end to the viruses that the world throws at us? How frustrating to optimistic science, that for every two strides forward, the winds of the world push us back one.

It went on like this. Story after story. All were depressing and filled with mockery. Finally I had enough of this self whipping. I turned the TV off. I thought of reading an escapist novel. That had worked in the past as a way to relieve pain and anxiety. But it didn't work this time. The author's words, which once had seemed so clever and entertaining, were stale and predictable. I mean, what did I care about the homo-erotic concerns of nineteenth century vampires. I closed the book with a snap. It was not enough.

I had not brought my Bible but I felt like I needed to read it. So I picked up the *Gideon bible* from the night stand beside my bed. I was going to let it open up anywhere and start reading. I opened up the front cover. Neatly placed in the center of the cover page was a label inscribed with a skull and crossbones. Written beneath the emblem were the words, "Warning, the words inside are not true and are hazardous to your health."

"Cute," I thought. "Real cute." Now I don't know anything about the *Gideons*, but I was cer-

tain they had not put the skull and crossbones label in the front their Bible. Not thinking, intuitively, in an act of anger, I tore the label from the book. I felt that the label was just another intrusion from the world... in fact, at that moment, I felt that the placing of the label in the book was an act of Satan. It was a temptation placed before me to read no further.

Now that the Bible was clean, I allowed the Bible to fall open randomly. My eyes fell upon the words ~~which you heard read earlier~~ from Psalm 22: "Many dogs surround me, a pack of evildoers closes in..."

"What's this?" I thought. It was another skull and crossbones. But with a difference. Such a big difference. These words were part of a lament written long ago and were probably sung in the first temple in Jerusalem. An ancient poet cries out against the world's evil and sorrow. It's a prayer.

The poet's prayer rings out with truth in our world as well. Why? It is obvious. Evil never changes and is always with us.

As I read the psalm from beginning to end several times, I saw clearly how the psalmist's words apply to us today.

It begins, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me, far from my prayer, from the words of my cry?" The poet's first words speak emotionally, humanly, and directly to God in response to some event unrecorded and long forgotten. It doesn't matter what the event was. It is enough to know that it was something deeply disturbing to the poet and to the tribes worshipping at the temple as well.

Today these words are still disturbing and full of power. Are they not?

They are still inspired by the

breath of God. Are they not?

They still strike chords of fear in us. And well they should.

Jesus Christ cried them out on the Cross as He suffered. He cried them out because he was fully human and felt human pain. And we gay Christians today, cry out as well. Do we not?

We cry out against the plague that eats the ranks of our tribe.

We cry out against the delay in fighting this plague.

We cry out against early death.

We mourn the athlete dying young.

We mourn the theologian John Boswell.

We rail against the death of friends.

We cry out against the Religious Reich: those bigots and Pharisees who rub salt in our wounds.

We cry out against hypocrites: those political snakes that speak sweet words in the temples but bite us in the dark.

We rail against those that would impose their perverted standards upon us.

The list is long. Each of you ~~here today~~ could expand the list a thousand times. And it would be good if we did. The crying out of hurts and pain is a cleansing thing... a prayerful thing. That is why the psalmist cried out, and that is why we cry out as well, every day we live.

And what else did the psalmist say to me that evening in my motel room: "I am like water poured out; all my bones are racked. My heart has become like wax melting away within my bosom."

The psalmist says, "I am full of fear." He prays about the human condition called fear. The poet feels he has been drained of life, that he

Psalm

continued from page 6

is numb with torture, that his once brave heart melts under oppression.

I felt the power of these words instantly when I read them. Not only are these words a description of the human fear Christ felt on the Cross, they are also a description of the fear gay people have in this world that "surrounds them like dogs." The dogs have the fangs to attack, to rend our flesh, and to crucify. We know the dogs of fear. I fear every one.

I fear Nazi and skin-head thugs.

I fear charlatan preachers preaching hate to innocent children.

I fear clever talk show hosts who feast on guile.

I fear fat scientists who gorge themselves on money never intend-

ing to find a cure.

I fear that my rights as a human being, my freedoms will be taken away.

I fear whispering behind my back.

I fear confrontation.

I fear gays who pander to those who scorn us.

I fear what a simple kiss may bring.

I fear change even though I may be bound in chains.

Think about your fears. They surround you like a pack of dogs. Confront them, one by one.

Quit your smiling. Yes, you. You are the one I'm talking about.

This very evening you must offer each snarling cur up to God. Do not hide them. Do not pretend

they are not there. Show them to God. Say, "God, I am afraid." For if you do not, they will multiply and grow even stronger.

Like the psalmist says, "Rescue my soul from the sword, my loneliness from the grip of the dog."

But there is an up side to this. When we have born all these griefs and fears up to God, and pleaded for rescue, we are lifted up. And like the poet we can sing, "So by your gift will I utter praise in the vast assembly; I will fulfill my vows before those who fear God."

This phrase is like the last lines in a sweeping epic. All the tribes are called in to stand before the high king. All personal foes have been conquered, and those others... those dogs whining from the dis-

tance... are kept at bay.

I closed the Bible. I felt lifted up. I felt that dull depression had given way to high hope. I knew we must remain vigilant for our children, that we must continue to bring our tribe home, help heal and make them strong. I felt that our time in the wilderness was nearly over, and that God was about to lift us up to our own promised land.

I think the following verses will always remain in my mind, and that they prophesy the future of our gay tribe:

*"Let the coming generation be told of the Lord
that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born,
the justice God has shown."*

John Foust

*Perspectives***Love's longing answered by God**

Everyone longs to give themselves completely to someone...to have a deep soul relationship with another...to be loved thoroughly and exclusively. But God, to a Christian, says, "No, not until you are satisfied, fulfilled and content with being loved by Me alone...with giving yourself totally and unreservedly to me...to having an intensely personal and unique relationship with me alone, discovering that only in me is your satisfaction to be found will you be capable of the perfect human relationship that I have

planned for you. You will never be united with another until you are united with me...exclusive of anyone or anything else, exclusive of any other desires or longings.

I want you to stop planning, stop wishing, and allow me to give you the most thrilling plan existing...one that you cannot imagine. I want you to have the best. Please allow me to bring it to you. You must keep watching me, expecting the greatest things...keep experiencing the satisfaction that I am. Keep listening and learning the things I

tell you. You must wait, that's all. Don't be anxious. Don't look around at the things others have gotten or that I have given. Don't worry. Don't look at the things you want. You must keep looking off and away up to me, or you'll miss what I want to show you. And then when you're ready, I'll surprise you with a love more wonderful than any you would dream of.

You see, until you are ready (I am working even this moment to have both of you ready at the same time.), until you are both satisfied exclusively with me and

the life I prepared for you, you won't be able to experience the love that exemplifies your relationship with me, and thus the perfect love. And dear one, I want you to have this most wonderful love. I want you to see in the flesh a picture of your relationship with me, and to enjoy materially and concretely the everlasting union of beauty, perfection, and love that I offer you with myself. Know that I love you utterly. I am the God, Almighty. Believe it and be satisfied.

*An anonymous piece
submitted by Eddie Merrill*

Covenant

T I M E S

THE NEWSLETTER OF COVENANT METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH
DECEMBER 1995

Buy the Building

'Yes' comes the vote at congregational meeting

Let's buy! That was the decision of the group present at last month's congregational meeting concerning the purchase of the Birmingham Wedding Chapel. Fifty-five people voted in favor of purchasing, three voted in favor of leasing and two abstained.

As in previous meetings the focus moved back and forth from the weight of a mortgage to the uplifting ministries possible if Covenant

were to own the building.

Even as the current owner sells off some of the articles in the building, we have begun loan applications at two financial institutions. Following drives to raise money and fundraising efforts, our building fund now stands at more than \$70,000.

Terry Gunnell, director of AmeriCorps won the raffled trip to Washington D.C. The raffle raised

almost \$2,000. The fundraising letter pulled in more than \$1,300.

Pledges toward the regular budget continue to come in, as are correction to pledge cards. Some people have changed weekly pledges to monthly ones. While others have moved building fund pledges to their regular tithe. If you have changes, talk to Allan F. or fill out a new card and mark it to replace your last one. ■

BOARD notes

BY MARK B. MOORE

Gifts of time and talent a must for Covenant

As we have seen our membership grow, as we have moved to purchase our worship facility, as we have debated issues of gay spirituality and gay marriages, I can only be thankful for the unique opportunity it has been to work in the capacity I have as vice moderator.

Decision making can be tough, meetings are often tedious, but this year, and as I forecast the next to also be, was a satisfying one.

In January, we will elect a new board, as four of the five positions

come open. They include one 1-year slot, and three 2-year slots. Any of our current board can run for election, but it is also time for some of you, to question and pray about where God will have you serve.

The board's main duty is governing the financial and physical affairs of the church. From working with the board I have concluded asking questions is as important as answering them. Members must be dedicated and attentive.

But serving on the board isn't for everyone. Like any growing church,

we have committees coming out of the woodwork. Our Council of Ministries handles areas like Christian education, evangelism and public relations. As people come and go, vacancies occur. You may have just what it takes to help on or head up a committee on the Council. And as we look to purchase this building different committees like one to handle keeping up the grounds must be restaffed.

Your ideas and hard work are needed for the CMCC's future growth. Take part. ■



A

Christmas Legend

December 17

7 p.m.

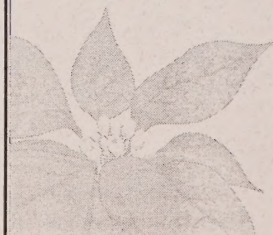
presented by the
CMCC Choir and

Drama Team

Communion will not be
served at this service.

Christmas Eve Worship

Instead of our normal
worship at 7 p.m. we will
have a light dinner at 8 p.m.
followed by a Christmas Eve
service at 10:30 p.m.
Please take part.



Covenant times

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Community Church

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Clergy In Formation
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Richard Barham, John Foust,
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Cal M., Shirley C., Kay H.,
Cliff T., Mark B., Eddie M.,
John F., and Peg S.

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MARGE'S musings

BY REV. MARGE RAGONA

Mary, Mary, revolutionary

The Magnificat is the song Mary sings when she learns that she is going to bear the baby Jesus. It is a song of upending and overturning. In the 1920s E. Stanley Jones compared the Magnificat with the Communist Manifesto and said that the Magnificat was the most revolutionary document ever recorded in history. Czars did not want it in the hands of serfs. Slaveowners were afraid for slaves to hear it. White South Africans felt it was against their interest for black South Africans to read it. Liberation theologians in Central America got it into the hands of the campesinos, the peasants. It has always been loved by the poor. Women in the church have claimed it for themselves.

A favorite book is The Gospel in Soltiname, a series of Bible studies with a

group of campesinos and Catholic priest Ernesto Cardenal, who was later assassinated for his work with the poor. In their discussion about the Magnificat, the campesinos relate easily to the ideas in this magnificent psalm. They understand that when the reign of God comes the oppressed will be raised, the hungry fed, and the rich sent away hungry.

Mary's God, deliberately and intentionally, is on the side of the oppressed. In Luke's gospel, Mary

is a symbol of the poor and oppressed in history. As a woman of a nation held in no esteem in the world, she represents the poor who

hears the word of God and keeps it." Mary, for Luke, is the exemplar of those who hear the word of God and keep it. In Luke, the

mighty, the scholars, the priests do not hear the word of God—in fact, they refuse to hear it. The heart of Jesus' message is that he had come to seek and save the lowly and despised ones. It is they who will hear and understand when the elite will not hear the radical message that the first shall be last and the last first; and that those who would be first in the Dominion of God must become servant of all.

This Christmas, let me offer the Magnificat as words to muse over, to mull over, and to learn to love, as those campesinos in Soltiname learned to love these promises and the Mary who first spoke them. Mary is not merely a



And Mary said, "My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my savior. For God has had regard for the humble state of this bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is God's name. God's mercy is upon generation after generation toward those aware of the awesomeness of God. Mighty deeds have been done with God's arm; God has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. God has brought down rulers from thrones and has exalted those who were humble. God has filled the hungry with good things and sent away the rich empty-handed. God has given help to Israel, God's servant, in remembrance of God's mercy, as God spoke to our parents, to Abraham's offspring forever.

LUKE 1:46-55 — THE MAGNIFICAT

will be filled with good things, those of low degree who will be exalted in the messianic transformation. Mary would be redeemed by her assent to God, "Let it be done to me according to your will." Without Mary's willing cooperation, God could not have acted in that moment in history when the Messiah would be born to a waiting world.

Jesus says later in Luke's gospel, as someone tries to bless his mother, "Nay, rather, blessed is she who

docile creature who allowed God to use her, but was one who was dynamically involved in bringing the Messiah to the world. Greek Orthodox speak of her as theoteka, "God bearer." If the Magnificat was indeed Mary's Song, then maybe she was aware that she was giving the world a new vision of God in her holy child. Merry Christmas, to all oppressed people. May the inbreaking of the Messiah into the world end oppression and bring Mary's reign of God to all people. ■



MANY VOICES

BY RICHARD BARHAM

In the tradition of our gay ancestors

One of my favorite "Christmas" passages is Luke 2:10-11: "But the angel said to the shepherds, 'Do not be afraid—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'" I am glad that the angels said the good news of Jesus was for *all* people. The fulfillment of this promise was seen immediately in the Christmas story itself. Who, but God, would have included the lowly, outcast shepherds? Who, but God, would have included Magi from the East?

By the way, who were the Magi? Who were these strangers? Reverend Elder Nancy Wilson in her new book, *Our Tribe*, proposes that maybe the Magi were really gay men. "We've always pictured them with elaborate, exotic, unusual clothing - quite festive, highly decorated and accessorized! . . . Also, the wise eunuchs, shamans, holy men were the only ones who had the forethought to go shopping before they visited the Baby Jesus! This seems to me to be an obvious gay clue! . . .

They also have shamanistic dreams. They deceive evil King Herod and actually play the *precise*

role that many other prominent eunuchs play in the Bible: they rescue the prophet, this time the Messiah of God, and foil the evil royal plot against God's anointed. It's a classic gay/eunuch drama! . . .

I mean, who were those guys? They get a whole chapter in Matthew and then disappear forever from the scene (another classic eunuch trait). They are foreigners. They are pagans. They are "queer." They are heroes, and their images grace millions of homes, windows, churchyards, chancels, children's pageants, musicals, and hymns every Advent and Christmas. Just think of all those children in the father's bathrobes in Christmas pageants every year, trying to portray three queens in semidrag!

Regardless whether or not they were gay, there is no doubt that they were foreigners. They were not traditionally included in God's covenant plan until the birth of Christ. We can identify with these Magi in more ways than their "gayness." We, too, know the experience of being the outcast foreigner. That is what makes the Christmas story so exciting for me. "Foreigners" were allowed to touch and worship the God who became flesh. God became approachable. It is good news for all people!

In the tradition of the Magi, I have experienced some of my happiest moments when worshipping God. Every time I lift God up in sincere praise and thanksgiving, God never fails in lifting me up in encouragement, peace, and joy. Real worship allows us to "taste" heaven.

Worship should be a priority always, but especially at Christmas. If God arranged for a star in the heavens to point to the Messiah, and if God sent a special choir of angels to announce the birth of Christ, then shouldn't I be bursting forth with excitement as well? Worship is not a spectator sport. Worship is an active response to God whereby we declare God's worth. It is a response to God's grace and inclusive love.

The Magi did not allow anything to abort their journey to the Christ child. They even traveled over 1000 miles through rough desert just to get to infant Jesus' home. There will be a lot of distractions and obstacles in our lives too this holiday season. Like our gay ancestors, let's not let anything stand in our way of worshipping God. And like our gay ancestors, we too can experience the joy of the presence of God. The God who proclaimed peace and goodwill to all people! Merry Christmas. ■

Mend a quarrel
Seek out a forgotten friend
Write a love letter
Share some treasure
Give a soft answer
Encourage youth
Keep a promise
Find the time
Give up a grudge
Forgive an enemy
Listen
Apologize if you are wrong
Try to understand
Examine your demands
on others
Be appreciative
Be kind and gentle
laugh a little, then a little more
Be deserving of the confidence
of others
Speak your love
Speak it again
Speak it still once again
Know the special wonder of
Christmas
Remember its joy throughout
the year
Rejoice
submitted by Shannon O.

LAISZY SPEAKS

BY STEVE PARKER

Conference uplifted and informed

Sixteen from CMCC attended this, the largest GLAD Conference ever. Rev. Randy Vouch challenged us to reach for the potential that is uniquely ours. Rev. Jeri Ann Harvey explained about "who's who" and "who's that." And Rev. Judy Dahl challenged us to "share our lunch" with the ministry of Global Outreach.

Worship was uplifting, workshops were pertinent, useful and educational. Many other churches in GLAD are buying or looking to buy buildings. GLAD continues to grow.

Keith Mason (Charleston) and James Tallent (Knoxville) were elected to the GLAD committee as Assistant District Coordinator and Lay Representative.

Then there was "Look to the Rainbow"—a musical review of our loves," written and directed by the Rev. Frank Scot of Asheville. The multi-talented cast made us laugh, cry and be thankful to God for who we are. Bravo! Bravo! A truly phenomenal show.

Next Conference? May 5,6,7 in Nashville. ■

Rev. Janie Spahr to speak

Rev. Janie Spahr is a Presbyterian minister denied the pulpit to which she was called at Downtown United Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY, because she is lesbian. She will speak at CMCC Sunday, Dec. 3 at 7 p.m. She is now an AIDS chaplain and evangelist for gays, lesbians and other sexual minorities in the church. Come hear this inspiring woman,

Methodist youth petition Conference

Mark Wilson announces that the United Methodist Youth National organization is petitioning United Methodism's 1996 General Conference to delete from the Book of Discipline language prohibiting ordaining or appointing "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" and a paragraph which prohibits the use of national church funds by gay groups.

Dear CMCC family,

It has been my privilege to serve CMCC since Sept. 1994 directing the Sunday a.m. choir and playing the piano. During this time, many of you have extended Christian support and love to Carol and me. For this, I thank you.

However, at this time, it is my task to tell you that I am resigning my music responsibilities at CMCC effective Dec. 30, 1995.

Sincerely,

Susan Walker, Music Director

DECEMBER

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					6 pm World AIDS day march from Brother Bryan Park 7 pm Service, Baptist Church of the Covenant	10 am Inquirer's Class (member- ship classes)
11 am Hanging of the Greens 7 pm Guest speaker, Rev. Janie Spahr. (see above)		6:30 pm Choir 8 pm Council on Ministries meeting		7 pm Bible Study		
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	7 pm Board Meeting	6:30 pm Choir		7 pm Bible Study		
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
7 pm Dramatic and musical presentation		6:30 pm Choir 8 pm Deacon Training		7 pm Bible Study	6:30 pm Meet at church. Caroling begins at 7 p.m.	
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
8 pm Light supper 10:30 pm Evening service New Year's Eve activities following worship	Christmas Day	6:30 pm Choir 8 pm Deacon Training		7 pm Bible Study		
24/31	25	26	27	28	29	30

DEACON'S

BY DEACON JOHN FOUST

Thoughts after reading heterosexual theology

Christmas is coming. It is the time where we remember that God became flesh and that God is becoming flesh even today as we as Christians try to be more Jesus like. Christmas gives us new strength to strive as we move toward a closer relationship with Christ. Christmas is a time to review our progress toward God and to take a long view about the good things to come.

I must admit that I have always thought that every person essentially strove to be closer to God alone. I thought that salvation did not have anything to do with another human being striving with me, but that salvation rested entirely in the outcome of my personal wrestling with God.

I do not think that I ever thought, as I understand Paul Tillich thought, that with enough pain and exploration God would finally notice and take me in. I have never felt passive in my search for God. On the contrary, I have felt that God loves me and have more and more come to believe that God has been with me always, but for some unknown reason I have not known what God wanted me to do.

Carter Heyward, in Chapter 4 of her book *Touching Our Strength*, brings Paul Tillich and other liberal theologians to task for limiting their view to the struggle of the individual rather than the struggle of a group. If you really think about it, the liberal theologians still love the medieval, idealized view of sainthood wherein an individual divorces themselves from the world and wears a hair shirt to constantly subdue the desires of the flesh. In these stories, once the saint's body has been subdued into a kind of numbness, the mind,

lacking stimulation, creates its own visions and events. These visions and events in many cases were seen as supernatural encounters with God. This is an extreme case, but it shows, nevertheless, why theologians might think an individual must strive to finally be granted a little rest in God's bosom.

In my early years I was subjected to this kind of thinking and partially embraced it. But in the end my body, my love of the sensual gifts of God, my search for joy, pulled me back from what I now consider an extreme position to an ambiguous place somewhere between embodiment and dualism. That is to say, I understand intellectually that salvation is through mutual effort and love, but I am still struggling with how I might do this. Do I just put myself in the hands of God, be a instrument, and see justice happen before my eyes? Hard to do. Very hard for me.

By questioning the ground on which liberal theologians rest, Heyward has made me rethink my position, once again. Indeed, she had put me into some turmoil. I feel that she is right but I need time to think it out for myself.

One of Heyward's statements really struck me. "Ironically, while Tillich was attempting to present a theology to cut through the lonely individualism of human existence, he failed to grasp the creative power of human subjectivity when 'humanity' is understood as an essentially corporate reality." Why did he fail to grasp, I wonder?

Both Heyward and Tillich are theologians. They are studying God. As a liberal theologian Tillich strives to maintain a critical distance between himself and God in order to produce a theol-

ogy free of bias or ideology. Nevertheless, he is seen by Heyward as "holding traditional power arrangements in place." In other words, she thinks Tillich bases much of his thought around heterosexual and patriarchal views.

To me the difference the difference between Heyward and Tillich can be seen by understanding that there are broadly speaking two ways of thinking. One way of thinking is to pile one logical argument upon another until a kind of limited truth can be shown. This thinking is called linear.

The second kind of thinking is more intuitive.. more like Heyward. It involves a kind of subjective use of the senses to know a truth without proof. We are often able to know the truth through an intuitive jump. We just know something to be true. I know that I feel that Heyward's position is correct although I do not know all the ramifications.

Why do I just feel that Heyward is right? Why do I feel certain that Tillich's arguments lead finally to one conclusion. "God is finally indifferent to the details of how we live together on the earth.." I think it is because Heyward sees God differently. She sees the sacred character of mutual power relations between humans, and the liberal theologians do not. She feels that the right way to salvation and just knowing the joy of God is through mutual support from other people in our lives. That we share power so that all advance. Heyward abhors those theologians that would espouse slave/master relationships in the struggle toward God.

I feel Heyward is right because she is homosexual just like I am. I support Heyward with certain reservations because she is one of the

few advocates that I know at this time. I plan to know more. I feel that her theology is more than just a reaction to Tillich and his kind, but finally makes a positive statement of how we as homosexuals can take the initiative in this debate and let the others react against us for a change.

However, I have always felt a kind of distrust for theologians and intellectuals because I have always expected too much from them. I guess I sought a kind of enlightenment through study and discussion. So many theologians load their discourses with insider words and abstract terms and thereby make themselves harder to understand. Heyward is no exception to this. I wish that she and other theologians might use words that come more from life and are not quite so abstract.

Just as I accept God as my savior with a leap of faith, so also I am inclined to accept Heyward's arguments on faith. Is it OK then to not understand all that Heyward says but to accept it anyway because I feel it is true? For me on a personal level, I believe it is OK. But if I am to espouse Heyward's teaching of mutuality to others, I must experience mutuality in my own life and experiences. I cannot just say to others "Carter Heyward says..." I must say to "I have been my experience that..."

Dear God, give me the patience to read through good theologians works in the coming year. Let me find truths there and develop them for my own. Dear God, be my eyes when I read theology and try not to smile and laugh when we read something absurd. We on earth are trying in our own clumsy way. Have patience. I am trying to have patience with myself as well. ■



*Peace on Earth
Good will to all*

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